

OMISSION SUPPLIED.—Mrs. Spencer desires to express her gratitude to the Rev. W. S. GRIFFIN, whose name, she supposes, has been inadvertently omitted, as the writer of the “Brief Sketch of the Author’s Life” contained in this work.

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SERMONS

BY THE

REV. JAMES SPENCER, M.A.,

OF THE

Wesleyan Conference,

CANADA.

"THEY WENT FORTH, AND PREACHED EVERYWHERE." Mark xvi. 20.

Toronto:

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1864.

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P R E F A C E.

No apology is offered for the publication of these Sermons, as it is believed they are by no means a valueless contribution to Methodist literature.

They have been published in compliance with a very generally expressed desire of the friends of the deceased author, and in the hope that their sale will prove a source of pecuniary benefit to his family, who, had he devoted himself to other pursuits, would doubtless have enjoyed ample means of support.

In reference to the memoir, the writer will only say that he accepted the task of sketching the character of his lamented friend with the greatest diffidence, and at the earnest and repeated solicitation of those who were the most interested in his life, and the most afflicted by his death.

It will be readily admitted, that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to exhibit in such narrow limits the character of one who occupied so prominent a position in the church.

The writer's aim has been to sketch in few words, and in ungarnished style, the leading traits of his character, in the hopes that it would be acceptable to his many friends, make his worth more widely known, and perhaps prove a consolation and comfort to those who were associated with him in the same field of labour.

Whatever the defects of the present volume, the memory of the Rev. JAMES SPENCER will never be erased from the history of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada.

P. S.—Acknowledgment of valuable assistance in preparing the sermons for the press, is due to Mr. W. W. Anderson, of Paris, C. W.

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BRIEF SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

MEN who have had a prominent place before the world while living, need no memoir after they are dead. If they were great, no amount of eulogy would increase their greatness. Their wise doings and noble sayings speak for themselves. They have written their own biography, and it may be read in their country's history. If they were insignificant, no possible amount of eulogy will ever make them great. The accident of birth or fortune may have made them conspicuous, but never made them useful. No biographer can do for them that which they had no ability to do for themselves. While the general correctness of this plain theory will be admitted, still it will not be denied, that a man may be in many respects great, and in every respect good, and yet because of the comparatively limited sphere of his life, his excellent qualities and undoubted usefulness may be generally unknown.

The subject of this brief memoir would scarcely have thought himself good—and the world in all probability would never have pronounced him great—but the church, in whose service he faithfully lived and triumphantly died, will not hesitate to record her sincere acknowledgment of both the one and the other.

Rev. JAMES SPENCER, A.M., was born at the family homestead in Stamford, not far from the old Lundy's Lane battlefield, on the 7th of February, 1812. He was the fourth son in a family of ten children. His parents, who were born in the United States, were among the first members of the Wesleyan Church in Canada. His father, a man of sterling worth and piety, died in the glorious triumphs of faith when James was yet only five years old. His mother still survives, having for more than half a century adorned the church of her early choice with a life of christian consistency and purity. There are no records left by Mr. SPENCER himself, or furnished by any member of his family, which throw any light upon the earlier years of his life. In fact, there are no materials out of which to construct a biography, except such as relate to his christian experience and history. It is his conversion to God, through the instrumentality of the Rev. Dr. Evans, that first presents him particularly to our notice.

The evidence of his conversion was perfectly clear—never once questioned during the rest of his life. From that date, however, there began a severe conflict with himself, which seems to have only fully terminated at his death. That conflict lay between an irresistible impression that it was his duty to preach, and a thorough conviction that he lacked the essential qualifications for that office. Duty driving him with a firm hand in one direction, and inclination in another, seem to have rent his soul at times with intolerable agony. For hours and hours together, times without number, he would shut himself up alone in solemn conference with God upon this all-absorbing question, piteously pleading for exemption from the claims that so heavily pressed him, and yet always feeling in the issue that he had gained no sense of relief from their pressure. What were the exercises of his mind upon

this subject during the years in which he prosecuted his studies, do not appear; but no sooner is he engaged in the work itself than the old conflict is renewed with all its former vigor.

He began his ministry in 1838 upon the Grimsby Circuit, and from a diary kept during the earlier years of his ministerial life, we are furnished with occasional references to the mental trials through which he was continually called to struggle. August 13th, he says, "Yesterday I tried to preach three times, but O, what poor work I make of it! It seems to me that I have neither the spirit of prayer nor of preaching, and without this what are finely finished sentences or well-composed sermons?" December 26th.—"I am sometimes at my wits end what to do. I am becoming more and more of the opinion that I am not in the proper employment for me. I wish to know and do the will of God, but that it is his will that I should occupy my present position in the Church, I am not convinced, but rather the contrary. 'O Lord, guide thou my feet in the way everlasting! Amen, and amen.'"

A letter addressed to the Rev. John Carroll about this time, contains a brief reference to his views on the question of his relationship to the Church, which he would have been willing and happy to sustain.

"I was never averse to doing what I could as a Local Preacher, for I experienced a pleasure in that employment, but for anything beyond that my abilities are too slender. I never could desire to engage in any work for which I had not *some* qualifications. I sometimes feel greatly encouraged in *trying* to preach, and at other times I lose all hope of ever doing any good in this capacity. What is the matter with me I cannot tell, but I have almost no appetite at all for food, although I am travelling the greater part of the time." No apology is offered for presenting a few additional selections from his diary, as they can scarcely be read without interest.

February 22nd, 1839. "I am daily becoming more deeply impressed with a consciousness of my unfitness for this holy work, and more fully determined to leave it. The thought of continuing it is almost insupportable. I could even wish to drag out my life under a broken constitution, or in any honest employment, however low, rather than be a travelling preacher. I have just now heard of a remark that has been made concerning me, which so exactly agrees with my own opinion of myself, that I do not in the least wonder at its being made:—'He will never make a preacher, he may as well stop first as last.'—*Bene dictum.*"

Notwithstanding his determination to abandon the ministry at the end of the year, still the following year, by the Minutes of Conference we find him stationed on the Newmarket Circuit, and, by his diary, still struggling with his great besetment.

He writes,—“I bitterly reproach myself for want of wisdom in consenting to take another circuit, and firmly resolve, if my life should be spared until the end of this conference year, to leave the work. I can hardly understand by what infatuation I was seized when I consented to accept of an appointment for another year.

“I have just finished reading Stoner's Life. Could I be as useful in the ministry as he was, I think worlds would not induce me to leave it; but of this I have no expectation. I am ready to pass sentence upon myself as an intruder into the sacred office.”

In the third year, to meet the exigencies of the work, his time was divided between the Whitby and St. Catharines Circuits, during which period he was much encouraged, but not exalted. He writes, “God has revived his work, and, although I cannot look upon myself as being in any degree instrumental, yet I can rejoice that I have had the happiness

of witnessing this blessed work, and, during its progress, of receiving increasing strength and joy in the service of God."

During the fourth year he was stationed on the Brantford Circuit, and the members of our Church in many places upon that circuit retain, and ever will retain, the most pleasing recollections of his friendly intercourse and successful labours among them. In the beginning of the year that burthen to which he is becoming accustomed by long continuance, presses him with unusual severity. July 1st. "The exercises of my mind, since Conference, have been to me most painful and afflicting. Contrary to my expectations, I have been removed from the St. Catharines to the Brantford Circuit, and I believe my removal was contrary to the will of God. This day I have been sorely tried, and I almost resolved at once and forever to leave the work of the ministry and engage in some employment more congenial to my feelings, and in which I will not be exposed to vicissitudes so painful and unprofitable, of which the present is a very unpleasant example."

After this period his diary is discontinued; but those who were numbered among his intimate friends well know that the temptation to desist from preaching never fully forsook him.

After his ordination, in the fifth year of his ministry, he was stationed at Cobourg as one of the Teachers in Victoria College, and would have been only too happy to have spent the residue of his life in connection with that Literary Institution—a sphere of life in which there is reason to believe, from his peculiar tastes and abilities, he would have won for himself no ordinary distinction—but circumstances over which he had no control, and which caused him no little grief for many years, cut short, at the end of one year, a career upon which he had entered, in the hope of a providential escape from the life of a Methodist Minister.

The two following years he was stationed upon the Dundas Circuit; during the first of which, in 1843, he was united in marriage, by the Rev. L. Taylor, to Miss Sarah Lafferty, daughter of James Lafferty, Esq., of Flamboro' West, a man widely known for his hospitality, and universally esteemed as an excellent type of the gentleman and christian. A passing tribute is also due to Mrs. Spencer's aged mother, whose estimable name is as ointment poured forth wherever she is known.

Mr. SPENCER's marriage seems to have been about the only thing in his life of which he could confidently say, in this I have been providentially directed.

As a wife, and as a Christian Minister's wife, Mrs. Spencer, no doubt, has many equals, but very few superiors. The present writer, for the period of one year, enjoyed the high privilege of being a member of this family, and feels no ordinary pleasure in being able to say, that in no one of the beautiful characteristics which enter into king Solomon's description of a wife, was she deficient. God gave them nine children, three of whom are with their sainted father in heaven.

The Conference assigned him, as his next field of labour, what at that time was known as the Toronto Circuit. From this, at the expiration of one year, he removed to the Nelson Circuit, where, for three years, he discharged the duties of his office with great acceptability and success.

It was during this period that he arrested public attention as a clear and forcible writer. His letters to the Rev. Alex. Pine, published in the *Christian Guardian*, in which, with a masterly hand, he exposed the supreme folly of High Church exclusiveness, and demolished, almost at a blow, the rotten fabric of their apostolical succession, pointed him out, at once, as the man who possessed the requisite abilities for the editorial chair of our connexional organ.

Guelph was his next Circuit, where he enjoyed a greater degree of popularity than had ever distinguished the previous years of his ministry. The Church in Guelph appreciated him as a preacher who had no superior in the ranks of the Wesleyan ministry.

His services, at the end of the second year, were claimed as Editor of the *Christian Guardian*, which office he entered in June, 1851, and held, without interruption, during the period of nine years.

The unusual length of time in which he held the lease of this office is the best proof of the high appreciation with which his services were regarded by the Conference—an unthankful position at the best—requiring no common degree of tact and ability to satisfy the tastes of the public on the one hand, and the views of the Conference on the other. At the close of his editorial career, the members of the Conference presented him with a beautiful and valuable gold watch, bearing a suitable inscription, as a testimonial of the high esteem with which they regarded his able and successful labours in the editorial chair. After vacating this office, he was appointed to the Brampton Circuit, where, for three years, he was successfully employed in the pastoral work, from which for so long a period he had been entirely separated.

At the Convocation of Victoria College, in May, 1863, the honorary degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon him, a title of which it was long felt that he was justly deserving, because of his solid and varied learning—a title, indeed, which in six months' time, could he have remained in College, he would have earned and received many years before. At the Conference, in June, 1863, he received his last appointment—to the Paris Circuit. He entered upon his work with more than usual spirit, and dreamed not of the solemn change which so soon awaited him.

He was assailed with a virulent attack of erysipelas that baffled every effort of medical skill; and after two weeks of most excruciating suffering, he died, in the 52nd year of his age, on Friday, the 9th of October, 1863.

His sufferings from the first were borne with the utmost patience, and in perfect submission to the will of God; and although he never entertained the idea, till the very day of his death, that they would terminate fatally, yet much of his time was employed in seeking a more intimate acquaintance with Christ, and a more perfect preparation for his conflict with death.

The writer was commissioned to break to him the unexpected intelligence that he was about to die. He enquired—is that the opinion of my physicians? On being assured that all hope of recovery was abandoned, both by them and his friends, without the least apparent agitation he closed his eyes and engaged in silent and earnest devotion. It was a touching scene—a dying man in audience with the living God. The agony of his prayers soon gave way before the triumphs of his faith. The blessings came in streams. He exclaimed, “I have never experienced this before—all Christ’s! I can only see you and know you all through Christ. I have loved you before, but never as I love you now.”

His last consecration of himself to God, so deliberately, devoutly, and solemnly made, on the confines of an unknown world, will never be forgotten by those who were present. “My soul, body, affections, powers, memory, will, wife, children, and whatever else beside, are consecrated unto God.” Being encouraged to believe that God would surely sustain him, he replied, “I have always believed that God would not forsake me, and I am not aware that I have ever forsaken him.”

His afflicted wife tenderly addressed him with the salutations of parting. He answered, "Why should we part; I do not intend to part from you; we are one in Christ; I look upon this relationship as having to do with both worlds; if you do not leave Christ we shall never part."

Though dying, he seemed to feel that his work was not yet completed; with unusual earnestness he exclaimed, "I should like to live to preach, as I never have done, the glorious salvation of Christ." His soul was filled with the wondrous theme, and, for several minutes, with glowing spirit and in glowing language, he descanted upon the sublimity of christian truth and comprehensive character of the christian enterprise. The most affecting incident in the last hours of this good man was occasioned by his own request, that his two eldest daughters should sing for him those touching and beautiful lines, commencing,—

"Come, sing to me of heaven when I'm about to die."

And the weeping children sung, while the dying father shouted. His joy heightened into rapture, and all present seemed to forget the deep sorrows of the chamber of death, in the holy transports of one to whom the portals of everlasting life were being opened. A short time before he expired, one said to him, you are almost home—"Well, then, let me have one more shout of victory;" and, summoning all his remaining strength, he did shout over and over again, "Glory to God! Glory to God! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! the valley of death is not dark; it is all bright and glorious." The interests of his family had exercised much of his anxious thought, but he was now able to declare that all anxiety was removed, and that he had the most perfect confidence in the guardian care of their Heavenly Father.

Rev. Dr. Wood, whose coming he anxiously awaited, arrived

only in time to exchange the last salutations of christian friendship, and to hear the last declarations of christian triumph.

The funeral services were conducted by the Revs. Dr. Green, (President of the Conference,) and Dr. Wood, (Superintendent of Missions,) in the presence of an immense concourse of sorrowing people. Not less than thirty ministers of the Wesleyan and other churches were present. Dr. Green, his warm friend, and for many years his colleague in the Conference establishment, preached an able and appropriate discourse from St. John xi. 25, exhibiting with evident emotion, and in suitable terms, many of the qualities and virtues of this distinguished servant of God.

As an humble, unaffected Christian, he always maintained the most exemplary character.

What a man thinks of himself may be best known from what he has written upon this personal question, without the least expectation that it would ever be seen by any eye but his own. There can possibly be no motive for deception. A few quotations, therefore, from his diary, will afford the best testimony as to the character of his Christian experience :

"When I look into my heart and behold its corruptions, I am ready to pass sentence upon myself as an intruder into the sacred office. And besides, what good have I ever done; I know not of any. I have been told that I have been instrumental in doing good, but I do not know it, nor am I at all ready to believe it."

"O that God would pour out his Spirit upon me to qualify me for this work. Christ says, without me ye can do nothing. If he that trusts in himself is a fool, how many fools are there in the world. The Lord has been trying lately to teach me this lesson, but my progress is very slow."

"I am daily more deeply sensible of my need of more faith; a more full conformity to the will of God. Glory to God! I am making some little advancement, and God is reviving his work upon the circuit; sinners have been saved, but the work has been done by the instrumentality of others; as for myself I am but a blank."

"I am encouraged. I have heard that my poor efforts have been made a blessing to one soul. I am more than ever convinced that without the life of God in the soul, no man can preach the gospel with effect. O Lord, revive thy work in my heart! O for power to preach with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven! Holy Lord, give this power, and give it now!"

These few of the many quotations that might be given, throw open the door of his closet life, and reveal to us the Christian in communion with himself and his God.

By nothing was his christian character more distinguished than that of fearless integrity. He utterly abominated all duplicity. Straight-forward himself, he demanded straight-forwardness in others; and when he discovered its absence in any, even if it were in one who had been his confidential friend, he cast him from him as he would a viper, and dealt with him in faithfulness amounting sometimes to severity. Towards human infirmity he was deeply compassionate; towards human iniquity almost unmerciful. The last thing in the world with which he would be charged, even by his enemies, is hypocrisy; and if he discovered it in others, almost the last thing in the world for him to neglect would be its exposure and punishment. In the execution of his purposes, whether in ordinary business or special legislation, he never stooped to avail himself of any unfair advantage. In the councils of Committee or debates of Conference, he always felt that that which could

not be carried by fair and honest means ought forever to be abandoned.

Not less noticeable was his manly independence. He courted no man's favour; he feared no man's displeasure. He leaned not even on his friends in the time of trial and conflict, and quailed not before the forces of his opposition, however numerous and powerful. He would have scorned the suggestion to solicit or to purchase the support of his friends. And with equal intensity he would have scorned either to solicit or purchase submission from his foes. He thought for himself. It was a moral impossibility that he should be a mere tool for any man. It was never necessary for him to learn other men's judgment before he formed his own. He waited not to read other men's arguments before he constructed arguments for himself. In him there was no parade of consequence; by him no flourish of trumpets, and yet he had an infinitely greater amount of true courage than those usually possess who are accustomed to such display. He hesitated not to assail any position, or combination, however formidable, even though he questioned the probabilities of success. Nerved by the conviction of duty, and encouraged by the consideration that if he was in the right, there was the certainty of ultimate triumph. There was in him no such veneration for ancient usages and institutions as to awe him into submission to their abuses, or to prevent him from laying violent hands upon them, if they, in his estimation, stood in the way of undoubted rights and privileges. His independence of spirit and action was not therefore to be crippled by the decisions and acts of former times, any more than by the authority of the present.

Equally worthy of notice was his sincere and disinterested *friendship*. Somewhat phlegmatic in temperament, he was

never lavish in the tokens of his attachment, yet they were always sufficiently warm and full to strengthen and maintain the most affectionate regard.

By him, friendship was never employed as an instrumentality in accomplishing personal ends. He never claimed nor expected from it that which an intelligent judgment would be compelled to refuse. Friendship, with him, was a social quality, not a business habit. He loved his friend because he was good; not because he was great, and might therefore be able to render him service. It was equal to any ordeal, however severe; and no amount of obloquy could possibly alienate or weaken it, so long as personal confidence remained unshaken.

His faithfulness was among the most striking elements of his friendship. He candidly told his friends their errors; chastised them for their faults, and warned them of their dangers. Many young men, and not a few old men, in the Church and in the Conference, have had reason to be grateful for his honest and affectionate counsels.

In his family relations he was most exemplary; maintaining at all times the dignity of the Christian Minister, and yet freely unbending himself to the social familiarities of domestic life. He was devotedly attached to his family. In its bosom he experienced his highest earthly enjoyments; and in its duties he was scrupulously and earnestly faithful. Those who did not enjoy the privilege of an intimate acquaintance would have pronounced him ungenial and unsocial; yet his genial spirits were almost always full to overflowing, and needed only the slightest provocation to draw them forth.

There was a lively humour in the composition of his nature which never failed him, and which added not a little to the interest of his social intercourse. In his playful moods he

was very ironical; yet his irony was so transparent as never to deceive. This peculiarity of character adhered to him to the last; in the period of sickness, as well as in the time of perfect health; when dying, as when living. A friend said to him, only a few hours before his death, "You are going to leave us very soon;" with that playful expression of countenance so familiar to the eye of intimate friends, he said, "If I should not, I suppose you would all be very much disappointed."

It is not easy to place a proper estimate upon his value as a member and officer of the Conference. Twice the Conference honoured him with the Secretaryship, and once with its representation to the English Conference.* He was always qualified and ready for Conference service. He had acquainted himself with the laws, usages, and general polity of the Methodist Church from the earliest period of its history. He was familiar with all the different stages of legislation in our own Conference, and was always prompt in the expression of his opinion, and decisive in the course of his action. During his time there were several questions of vital importance considered and settled. One of these was the Union effected between the British and Canada Conferences, in which it is true he took little or no public part, because of his ministerial youth. But private correspondence of that period with leading members of the Conference, still existing, affords the surest proof of the deep interest he felt in the question, and anxiety that all its provisions should be perfectly free from the least misconception by the ministers; and so clearly and fully presented to the people as to preclude all possibility of dissatisfaction in the future; and some of his suggestions, in this way, it is believed, enter into the details of the articles of Union.

* He was Secretary of the Conference at the time of his death.

Another of the questions to which allusion has been made, was one which had reference to the more efficient and satisfactory working of the Conference system, in which he not only took an active but a leading position. Although there are honest differences of opinion in respect to the changes effected, yet nothing for many years has produced a more general and perfect feeling of satisfaction. From the earliest period of the history of the Conference in this country, Chairmen of Districts received their appointment at the hands of the President.* The duties of a Chairman's office are too well known to need explanation here. The ministers felt that interests to them, more precious than life itself, were in the hands of men over whose appointment to office they exercised little control, except in the election of the Advisory Committee chosen to counsel the President in their appointment; while it is believed that as a rule they exercised their power most conscientiously, yet as the mode of their appointment was at variance with the system maintained in the English Conference, and with those views of responsible Government, in which men in these days are so generally educated, it was impossible that the Conference would ever be fully at rest so long as this system remained unchanged. It was a change, however, to which a respectable number of the ministers would reluctantly yield. Their earnest views, and strong prejudices must be encountered, and, if possible, overcome. To do this, Mr. SPENCER would naturally feel that he had a special commission. Associated with him were men of kindred views and spirit. The friendly conflict was carried forward, and finally terminated in securing the desired legislation, without leaving any perceptible irritation or unpleasantness. It is

* This system was inherited from the Methodist Conference in the United States, to which this Conference formerly belonged.

well enough known that the results of his labours, in this as in many other things, were not in exact harmony with his views. Still he felt that much had been gained, and time would accomplish the rest.

As a writer, it has very generally been conceded that he possessed that certain qualification (whatever it is) which renders a man a successful editor. Not every good writer is therefore a good editor. Talents widely different are those which distinguish the ordinary essayist from that of the ordinary correspondent. Each in the proper sphere of his own efforts may command general admiration for unusual ability, yet neither the metaphysical style of the one, nor the careless rambling style of the other, would impart an influential tone to the editorial. The ability to avail himself of the talent by which each is distinguished, a happy combination of both in the production of editorial matter, gave to Mr. SPENCER'S writings that distinctive character which, as a general rule, arrested the attention of newspaper readers; besides, in almost all the controversies in which his pen bore a part, there was a constant overflowing of that pleasant humour which was so characteristic of his conversation in social life.

He always proved himself an able defender of Methodist doctrines and polity, and an eloquent advocate of the great principles of Protestant Christianity, and many a time have his opponents been compelled to retreat, withering under the pungent sarcasm of his felicitous illustrations and arguments.

It remains that something should be said of him as a preacher. As to the quality of his talents in this respect the less will need to be said, as the accompanying volume of sermons will afford the most unequivocal testimony. They are selected from the earliest as well as the latest period of his ministry, and are thought to present a fair sample of his ordinary style and ability as a preacher.

They were never intended for the press, and the editor has not felt at liberty to alter the M.S.S. in any material respect; although, therefore, they may fail to exhibit his usual correctness as a writer, they afford an honest and perfect view of his mental preparations for the pulpit. They are not given to the public in this form under the impression that they are distinguished by extraordinary originality of conception, or great wealth of illustration, but as a sound and clear embodiment of Bible instruction on many questions of Christian privilege and duty, and a faithful and earnest exhibition of some of the fundamental truths of Divine salvation. Many into whose hands this work will fall, will readily recognise some sermons at least, with which they have already formed a profitable acquaintance. It is, however, believed that this will create no feeling of regret, as they will now enjoy the opportunity of perusing, and studying at their leisure, expositions of Divine truth, which, when originally heard, were greatly blest to them as the direct deliverances of God. These sermons, like all others that he ever delivered, are almost altogether free from ornament, and entirely free from display. He had no particular taste for the former, and a most utter aversion to the latter.

Few men ever realised more sensibly the responsibilities of the ministerial office. He felt that he was commissioned of God to make overtures of reconciliation to the world; to do which, with the parade of human learning and ability, was in his view a wicked trifling with the sacred and solemn questions at issue between man and his Maker. It is proper to say that the first impressions usually made by him as a preacher were very much to his disadvantage. A certain degree of apparent embarrassment, hesitancy of speech, and monotony of tone, not unfrequently armed his hearers with a prejudice, which the substantial qualities of his sermon often failed to remove.

It is equally just to remark, that a more perfect acquaintance with the man, and familiarity with his preaching, rendered his intelligent hearers, if not utterly, to a great degree oblivious to these imperfections. There were times, however, when even first impressions were in his favour, especially on some unusual occasion, as in Church Opening or Camp Meeting services, when all his powers being fully aroused, he has proved himself more than equal to the sanguine expectations of friends, and more than a conqueror of all the prejudices with which men who never heard him before might be invested. On many such occasions, never to be forgotten, he has carried the congregation as by storm, and truly earned the title of a powerful pulpit orator.

That which is always felt to be the best evidence of a Minister's qualifications, is the conversion of sinners to God. This evidence in his case is not wanting. It has been seen how humiliating were his views of his efficiency as a Christian Minister, and how constantly inclined to ascribe every success with which he was connected to the instrumentality of others; yet on almost all his fields of labour are to be found the precious fruits of his ministry, and in some localities that fruit literally abounds.

As a Superintendent, he was a strict and faithful disciplinarian, exacting a punctual and regular observance of all the rules of church membership. As a colleague, always honourable, considerate, and kind. He thought that both duties contained in the answer to the second question of section third, in the book of Discipline, were equally binding: "*To see that the other ministers or preachers in his circuit behave well and want nothing.*"

In concluding this "*in memoriam*," it is readily acknowledged that like all other men he had his infirmities, some of

which may have stood in the way of greater usefulness and popularity; but it is not the office of friendship, unbroken while he was living, and sacredly cherished in memory, now that he is dead, to register and proclaim them to the world; and being thoroughly convinced of the purity of his aims and integrity of his purposes in all the pursuits and labours of his life, the writer believes that if every one of his faults were recorded on the same page with his numberless virtues, they would in no sensible degree depreciate his pure and noble character.

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SERMON I.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL MEANS OF GRACE.

AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, IF THOU HEAR NOT MOSES AND THE PROPHETS NEITHER WILL THEY BE PERSUADED THOUGH ONE RISE FROM THE DEAD.

LUKE xvi. 31.

It is very common for persons to imagine that if they were favoured with such and such privileges, which there is no probability they will ever enjoy, they would pursue a course of conduct very different from that which under the present circumstances they are almost compelled to pursue ; or, that if they were placed in the situation of such and such persons, they would act very different from them, and make a better improvement than they do of the advantages they possess. If irretrievable losses come upon us, or if we are the subjects of sad and hopeless misfortunes, we are ever ready to ascribe our adversities to the circumstances in which we were placed, rather than to our own misconduct ; and to imagine that if we had been favoured with other, and what we may think more favourable means, though perhaps in reality altogether unnecessary, we would have avoided these calamities, and been more successful in our efforts to obtain the desire of our hearts. Such it appears were the opinions of the character to

whom the words of the text were addressed. This parable, or as some very properly suppose, this narration of a real occurrence of which the text is the conclusion, seems to have been particularly designed to rebuke the pride of the Jews, who, enriched with outward privileges, treated the Gentiles with disdain as being unworthy of a place amongst their dogs; and in this representation we have one of the most fearful disclosures of the miseries of a soul lost for ever, which is found in the revelations which the Gospel contains. Of the rich man here mentioned it is said that he fared sumptuously every day, and was clothed in the most costly apparel. But his riches could not shield him from the attacks of death. In the midst of his worldly pleasures, and when perhaps he thought himself most secure, he was seized by the hand of death with as little ceremony as was observed in the case of the beggar Lazarus who had lain at his gate. But mark the different consequences which followed the death of these two persons: "And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." Lazarus was a son of affliction and poverty on earth, but an heir of glory in heaven. The rich man lived but to enjoy his sensual pleasures, and dying he inherited everlasting woes. He lifted up his eyes and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, and he earnestly requests that Lazarus might be sent to bring him a little water to mitigate, if possible, his intolerable torments. But when he was informed that this favour, small as it was, could not be granted, he requests that an extraordinary messenger might be sent from the world of spirits to warn his brethren, and to prevent them from coming to the same wretched place. In answer to this request, Abraham informs him that to send

such a messenger was altogether unnecessary, because that his brethren were already favoured with every means, and every motive necessary to induce them to repent, if they would but properly improve them. They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. He urges his request still further, and with all the earnestness of woe he replies, "Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they would repent." If some one would go and tell them how much I am suffering in these tormenting flames they would repent. It is true that they have Moses and the prophets, and if they would but attend to what they reveal, it would be sufficient; but they disregard them, and if one would go to them from the dead they would perhaps listen to him and repent. Abraham, however, insists upon the denial of it, and declares that if the advantages they had were not sufficient to lead them to repentance, all other means whatever which might be employed would be equally unsuccessful; that if they were so hardened in their sins as not to hear Moses and the prophets, if they will not hear the testimony, nor take the warning they give, neither will they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.

The great truth which we may learn from the text is this: that the means with which we are favoured for securing our present and future happiness are abundantly sufficient, if properly improved, to accomplish this important end; and that if these means prove unsuccessful in leading us to repent of our sins, and to seek the blessings of salvation, none others will ever be afforded us; and even were we favoured with any other advantages, and were other efforts employed to bring us to repentance, they would be no more likely to prove successful than those we now possess.

I. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets." By the

writings of Moses and the prophets we are to understand the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures, which were all the inspired writings in existence at the time when our Saviour was upon the earth, and of these were comprised the Jewish Scriptures. They acknowledged their divine authenticity and the necessity of obedience to what these Scriptures enjoined, in order to escape punishment and obtain eternal life hereafter. The writings of Moses and the prophets contained all the instruction necessary to guide men into the way of life and salvation; they pointed out the only way to heaven, and they set forth the most powerful motives to obedience by the most glowing descriptions of the happiness of the obedient; while on the other hand the miseries of the ungodly and the wicked were portrayed in the most fearful light in order to deter them from walking in the way of transgression and eternal death. And if any were so hardened in their impenitence as not to attend to the instructions they contained; were so fully determined to live on in their sins as to be regardless of all the threatenings and woes which they pronounced against the sinner; and if none of the considerations urged by Moses and the prophets were sufficient to persuade them to obedience, a messenger from the world of spirits would meet with no better success. He could not speak with greater authority than Moses spoke; nor could he have urged any more powerful reasons to induce them to repent, than those which they already had set forth in those writings which they received as a revelation from God.

But if the declaration of the text was true when applied to those who lived under the Jewish dispensation, with how much greater force and propriety does it apply to those who live, as we do, amidst the luminous blaze of the Gospel light, and who are favoured with every means and motive which we

can possibly desire to enable us to make our calling and election sure. Every thing has been done on the part of God which he could do consistently with his own perfections and the free moral agency of man. God himself asks, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" What could he have done more than he has done to open, and point out the way of salvation; and what greater help could he have afforded to enable us to walk in the way of life? The Gospel which we can read for ourselves contains the revelations of God's goodness and mercy to man. By this Gospel we are taught our lost and miserable condition by nature. In it we behold the unbounded goodness of God and the riches of his grace in our redemption by the gift of his only-begotten Son, through whose atoning mediation we are delivered from sin and death. In this Gospel, also, life and death are set before us in the most clear and forcible manner. To encourage us to choose life, there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises. We are assured that the Holy Spirit will be freely given to enable us to repent of our sins, to enlighten our minds, to quicken our souls, to sanctify our hearts, and to prepare us for a blissful immortality. Heaven with all its glorious joys and rich rewards is set before us to excite our hopes, to animate our desires, and increase our diligence in seeking the preparation necessary for its enjoyment. While on the other hand, in order to alarm our fears, and to lead us to flee from the wrath to come, the Gospel points out to us the fearful consequences of dying in our sins, and unfolds to our view, in some measure, the horrors of the damned, and the hopeless torments of a lost eternity. Thus in the Gospel we have every thing which is really necessary for our salvation, the clearest instruction possible, the most gracious encouragements, and the most faithful and solemn

warnings of our danger. The divinity of this Gospel is established by incontestible evidence, by the miracles of the Author, and by the happy experience of hundreds and thousands who, in life and death, have felt its saving power.

The doctrines of this Gospel teach us how we may obtain the favour of God; its promises to encourage us to expect all the divine help we need in working out the salvation of our souls; it places before us the cheering prospect of obtaining a crown of life, and an exceeding and eternal weight of glory as the final reward of obedience. It also opens to our view the nature of that miserable place which is to be the everlasting abode of all who live and die in their sins.

Now, if sinners will not hear the truths of the Gospel, and be induced to repent from the powerful reasons by which the gospel enforces the necessity of repentance; if the ordinary and special means of grace, and the opportunities which they enjoy, fail in producing upon them their designed effect, in "turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," any other means whatever which might be employed would prove equally unsuccessful. If they break through all the restraints of the divine law, if they will persist in turning a deaf ear to all the gracious invitations of redeeming love, and the fearful threatenings of God's fierce displeasure, they would be equally deaf to all that a messenger from the eternal world could say to induce them to repent; they would be no more persuaded by the reasons he would urge, than they are by those contained in the Scriptures. If they reject the message of divine truth brought from heaven by the Son of God, it is not at all likely that a message brought by one returning from the place of the dead would meet with any more favourable reception. The truth of this will appear more clearly if we consider,—

1st. That a messenger from the dead could not give us any information upon the subject of our soul's salvation which we do not already possess. The Scriptures, which we have, are able to make us wise unto salvation, and one rising from the dead could tell us no more concerning our natural depravity; he could not unfold to us more clearly the plan of salvation; nor could he describe in a more attractive and pleasing manner the glories of heaven, nor portray in more fearful and repulsive form the miseries of hell, and the horrors of eternal death. He might, it is true, relate his own experience and tell what he had seen. If he had returned from heaven, he might tell us something of the beauty and the pleasures of the heavenly mansions; or, if he should come from the abode of lost spirits, he might tell us of the torments of the damned. But all the information he could possibly give would be nothing more than a repetition of what we already possess. He could urge no new motive to induce sinners to repent.

2nd. But again, one from the dead could not speak with greater authority and more certainty than the Scriptures speak. In the Scriptures we are addressed by the supreme authority of the King of kings; his laws were delivered amidst the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai, and we have the strongest possible proof of the absolute certainty and the divine reality of the truths which the Scriptures reveal. But in the case of one returning from the dead, all the authority with which he could deliver his message would be that of a mere creature; and after all we might be left in utter doubt, without any evidence sufficient to satisfy us of the certainty of the things which he declared. Not only so, but in such a case we should have much stronger reasons to suspect some cunning trick or delusion, than we now have to suspect the authenticity of the Scriptures. We have the most positive

evidence that the Scriptures are not a cunning devised fable, and in respect to what they reveal, deception is utterly impossible; but how often have there been instances of persons whose minds have been so affected as to imagine that they saw ghosts and heard them speak, when in reality all that they saw and heard was but the mere picture of their own disordered imagination.

It may be probable according to the account which Josephus gives of the wealthy Jews, viz. : that they were mostly Sadducees who disbelieved the doctrines of angels and spirits; that the five brethren of the rich man were of this sect; and, in the opinion of their brother, nothing more was necessary to convince and bring them to repentance, than that they should be visited by an apparition or spirit from the invisible world. But Abraham tells him that if they would not believe this truth upon the evidence they already had, one going unto them from the dead would afford them no stronger proof, and they would be unbelievers, and impenitent after all. The truth of this assertion is fully proved in the case of those persons who saw another Lazarus raised from the dead, and who, instead of being convinced by the miracles, from that moment conspired against the life both of Lazarus and of Christ; and also in the conduct of the soldiers who were the eye-witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, and who yet that very day suffered themselves to be hired to bear a false testimony against it. The testimony of a spirit from the eternal world would not be half so convincing as the evidence which proves the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and the truths they reveal; and all who refuse to believe the latter, would not be convinced by the appearance and testimony of one from the dead. If they were infidels and impenitent sinners in the one case, they would be equally so in the other.

We notice further : That a person returning from the dead would have no power whatever to change the unbelieving and wicked heart of men. It is certain that no human spirit, while it is in the body, can persuade another to repent ; can work in it an entire change both of heart and life. Nor can we suppose that a spirit, when separated from the body, has any more power to do this than it had before. Nor is there anything in the appearance of one returning from the dead that is at all calculated to awaken and convert the sinner. He might indeed be frightened and terrified at the apparition, but no man was ever frightened into the enjoyment of religion. There is no such thing as that, whatever some may suppose. Repentance and faith are the work of the judgment and of an enlightened and reflecting mind, as well as of the feelings ; and it is a work which the terror created by the appearance of one from the dead would render us unable to perform ; so that instead of leading us to repentance it would produce the contrary effect. We should soon recover from our fright, our corruptions would get the better of our fears ; we would persuade ourselves perhaps that it was all a delusion, and soon return again to our sinful pursuits and worldly pleasures. There is nothing less than the power of God can produce in the human heart that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation ; and the ordinary means by which this repentance is produced, is not by the appearance of a ghost, but by the application of Scriptural truth to the mind of the sinner by the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus awakening the conscience, informing the judgment, softening the heart, and giving that supernatural discovery of the real nature and consequences of sin which is absolutely necessary, and which leads to the exercise of true repentance.

There is no other way in which we can be saved. The

word of God, which is made spirit and life to our souls, by the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, is ordinarily the means, and this is the only and the all-sufficient means that God is pleased to use to bring our dead souls to the possession of spiritual life. If we remain impenitent amidst the privileges of the Gospel, it is only a fatal delusion for us to hope, or expect, that any other means which might be employed would have any more powerful effect, or greater influence in bringing us to repentance. If we harden our hearts against the warnings and invitations of the Gospel, visits from the dead, or being dragged through the very belly of hell itself, and sent back again to earth, would be utterly ineffectual to convert our souls. If all the spirits of the dead were to return to earth, and to describe to us in the most glowing terms, both the happiness of the saved and the misery of the lost, they could not produce one gracious feeling or one good desire in our hearts. They might alarm us for the moment by their appearance; and under the momentary excitement thus produced, we might, perhaps, utter an unmeaning prayer; but they could not give us that knowledge of our sinful condition which is the foundation and beginning of that true repentance which the Scriptures enjoin. The means which God has ordained for our salvation, and those means alone, are adapted to our condition. He has ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save them who believe the truths of his word. If through our wilful disobedience these means prove ineffectual to our salvation, as there are none others adapted to our condition, we must remain impenitent in our sins and perish forever. It is in vain for us to think that the mere circumstance of receiving a warning from one who had returned from the dead would induce us to repent, after having remained impenitent for years, notwithstanding all the warnings we have received from

God, from his holy prophets, from his only-begotten Son, and from his commissioned messengers, who, knowing the terrors of the Lord, have endeavoured to persuade us to be reconciled to him.

We have abundant proof of this declaration in the case of those persons who have been alarmed by some extraordinary occurrence, have for a time appeared to be deeply concerned for their safety, but who having no real conviction and sorrow for sin, have soon returned to their folly and wickedness. It is but a few years since that a very singular phenomenon appeared in the heavens—the stars seemed to be falling to the earth. Many thinking that the day of judgment was about to come were awfully alarmed for a time. But the fearful impressions thus made soon wore away without producing any permanent good, and I never have heard that even a single individual sinner was converted to God by its instrumentality, although it produced a more general alarm than the return of one from the world of spirits could possibly create. I fully believe that nineteen out of twenty of those who profess to repent on a death-bed, have nothing more than that worldly sorrow which the fear of death produces; and, dying in this state, they are lost forever, notwithstanding the fond hopes which their surviving friends may entertain of their final safety and everlasting happiness. For if we reject the only means of salvation, and grieve the Holy Spirit by which we are sealed, if sealed at all, unto the day of redemption, we shall be left to perish in the fond delusions we have chosen, and then all the angels in heaven and the appearance of ten thousand ghosts, and all fearful disclosures of the horrors of hell and damnation, which the revealing lights of eternity will make, will be utterly insufficient to lead us to exercise that repentance which is unto eternal life.

Now, we have not only Moses and the prophets, but God hath spoken unto us who live in these last days, by his Son. He has revealed to us our danger and the way of escape. The Holy Spirit is freely imparted to give us repentance and the remission of our sins, to sanctify our polluted souls and fit us for heaven. If, however, we commit the wilful sin of refusing this offered grace and salvation, after having received so clear a knowledge of the way to escape that death that never dies, and to obtain everlasting life, there remaineth no more sacrifice for our sins. No other means will ever be employed to bring us to repentance, and we must be left to the fearful expectation of meeting that fiery indignation which shall devour all the adversaries of the Lord.

God has done all things necessary for our restoration to his favour, and to all the joys of our forfeited inheritance. If, therefore, we miss heaven at last, and perish forever, the cause of our ruin will be, not in any want of efficiency in the means employed for our salvation, but in our own wilful, presumptuous and persevering disobedience.

May the Lord save us from this miserable fate for the Redeemer's sake! Amen.

SERMON II.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE RICH MAN.

AND IN HELL HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES, BEING IN TORMENTS, AND
SEETH ABRAHAM AFAR OFF, AND LAZARUS IN HIS BOSOM.

LUKE xvi. 23.

IF instead of being addressed on this occasion, as you are about to be by one of your fellow-creatures, suppose that a person from the eternal world were suddenly to appear in this assembly, and to relate to this audience the history of his own life, while he, as we are now, was upon the earth. Should he proceed further, and describe to us, with all the eloquence the discoveries of eternity can inspire, the nature of his abode in that world from which he had just returned, imagine, if you can, what would be the unearthly sensations that would pervade every breast, at the sight of such an unexpected and unusual occurrence. Suppose further, that in relating the history of his life he should inform us that he had been just and honest in all his dealings with his fellow men, that he had defrauded or injured no man ; had lived in peace and friendship with his neighbours ; and had endeavoured, as far as he was able, to assist the poor, to supply the wants of the needy, and to relieve

the suffering of the afflicted. Suppose, also, that in addition to all this he should tell us that he had been a professed member of the Church of God, strict in his observance of all religious rites and ceremonies, that he had been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, had constantly partaken of the Holy Sacrament, and that he had been faithful in the performance of all his religious duties, how would we be astonished, if after giving this fair history of his moral and religious life, he should tell us, that notwithstanding these good works and fair professions, his soul is lost forever, and he is doomed to suffer eternal torments ! Would not some of us feel, and justly feel, while listening to such an address from such a speaker, that our fond hopes of heaven were giving way ? Ah, should we not be irresistibly constrained to exclaim, Surely if that man, after all his good works and pious duties, is lost forever, my hopes of heaven are vain ! If he has been weighed in the balances and found wanting, how much more deficient shall I be found, when my actions are examined and the secrets of my heart are tried ? And, oh, if that man, so much better than myself, is unfit for heaven, how much more destitute am I of the qualification necessary to prepare me for that happy place ! If he is doomed to suffer the torments of hell, I shall surely be his companion in woe forever.

Although we may not be permitted to witness such a scene with our bodily eyes, yet in this account from which the text is selected, we are introduced, as it were, to an inhabitant of another world. We have a description of the character he bore in this world, together with the most awful account of his wretched and hopeless condition in eternity.

I am aware that there is some difference of opinion existing concerning this passage of Scripture, whether it is a history of a real occurrence, or merely a parable. It is of but little conse-

quence, however, as it respects the truths it contains, in which light we consider it, whether as a parable or as a narration. If it is a real history, then it is an account of what has taken place; some man has lived and died in the manner here described. If it be a parable, then it is a representation of what may take place; some person may live and die and may be tormented like this rich man, so that in either case the subject is, or ought to be, of equal importance to us; and it reveals truths in which we, as immortal beings, are most deeply concerned.

In the improvement of the subject we shall notice,

I. The sin of this rich man.

II. His punishment.

I. The sin, or the character of this rich man.

In conversing with persons on the subject of the future punishment of the wicked, we are frequently met with this objection,—“I cannot believe that God ever made any man to be miserable forever.” With this sentiment we most cordially agree. God has declared with an oath that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; and as a further proof of this, he has made the most abundant provision for the present and eternal happiness of all his creatures in the gift of his only-begotten Son. Certainly, if any are miserable forever, it is not because that God has decreed they should be so, but it is in consequence of their own misconduct. Now, if this rich man is, as the text declares, suffering the torments of hell, he must have been guilty of the commission of some sin or sins, for which the punishment he is receiving is but a just reward, otherwise we could not reconcile his torments with the justice of God.

We sometimes are apt to imagine, when reading the description here given of the awfully miserable condition of

this man, that he must certainly have been most notoriously wicked and profane. To this conclusion we may be very easily led if we notice merely the account of his punishment without attending to the brief and comprehensive description of his character. By attentively considering the description which this account contains, we may discover what was his real character, and the nature of that sin which shut him out of heaven and sent him to the place of torment. To this let us attend for a few moments.

1st. In the first place we are told that he was rich. Now there is no real harm in being rich. This can never be urged as an objection against any man's moral character, provided that he has obtained his wealth by fair and honest means. Not only is there no harm in being rich, but, we may observe, that wealth and riches are blessings promised to the righteous. There is no intimation here given that this man acquired his riches by any unfair means; either by dishonest dealing, or by grinding the faces of the poor. Not a word of this import is spoken, and we are left to conclude, that he obtained the riches either by honest industry, or by lawful inheritance.

2nd. The next thing is, he was clothed in purple and fine linen. Now, although this was a very costly dress, yet our Lord does not say that in the use of this he exceeded his income, nor that he dressed in any more costly manner than was really necessary to sustain his rank in life. Nor is it said that he used this costly dress as an agent of his crimes, by using the influence thus attached to his person and character in corrupting the morals of others. In justification of his conduct in this respect he might urge, that the situation he occupied in society rendered it necessary for him to be clothed in this costly apparel, and that the expense was no greater than he could well afford.

3rd. Lastly, it is said that he fared sumptuously every day. In reference to this part of his conduct, we may observe, that the law of Moses, under which this man lived, prohibited nothing on this subject but excess in eating and drinking. Indeed it seems as if the people under this law were authorized to enjoy the sweets of abundance, as the promised rewards of obedience. And this rich man, in faring sumptuously, violated no divine command. He is not accused of having eaten food prohibited by the law, nor with having neglected the fasts and abstinences prescribed by it. It is true, he is said to have fared sumptuously every day, but our Lord does not intimate that this was carried to excess, or that his good living ministered to the commission of open wickedness. He is not accused of any flagrant crimes, or even of immoral conduct. It is not said that he took the name of God in vain, or ever spoke an irreverent word against divine revelation, or against the ordinances of God. There is no mention made of his frequenting any places of folly and wickedness, like our modern plays, balls, theatres, card-tables, and horse-races. In a word, his moral character is not impeached, nor is he described as being guilty of any of those crimes which pervert the soul and injure civil society. I know that it is supposed by some that he was a hard hearted and uncharitable person, and that he refused to bestow upon Lazarus the small favour that he desired. But there is nothing in this account from which we can infer this. There is on the contrary every reason to believe that the request of Lazarus was not rejected. For when the rich man desired that Lazarus might be sent to him with a little water, it is a strong evidence that he considered him under some obligation to him for the favours he had received while he lay at his gate; nor does Abraham intimate in his reply that he had been guilty of any such uncharitable

conduct as that of spurning the poor beggar from his door. From the account here given of the character of this man, we find that so far is he from being represented as a monster of inhumanity, intemperance, and wickedness, he is not so much as charged with anything which is necessarily sinful. He was rich, and he used his riches in clothing and feasting well. No other evil is spoken of him. He was what we might call a good-natured, careless, and respectable sinner, living at ease in the full enjoyment of the abundance of the good things he possessed. Not only, as he is here described, was he free from outward sins, but he was also a professed member of the Church of God. This may be fairly inferred from the manner in which he addressed Abraham, and the reply he received. He called him, "Father Abraham." And Abraham in reply calls him "son": he acknowledges him as one of his posterity, as having descended from, and belonging to, that nation which the Lord had chosen for his own people. He was in all probability a member of the established church of the Jewish nation, and as such he had been circumcised according to the law, had eaten of the passover, and had perhaps been very zealous in saying his prayers, and strict in his outward observance, at least, of all the rites and ceremonies and duties enjoined by that Church of which he was a professed member. From a careful examination of this person's character we are therefore led to the conclusion, that he was a tolerably good man, and he would appear not only blameless, but a perfect saint in comparison with hundreds and thousands of the present day who are vainly dreaming of heaven.

What then was the sin of this man, and the cause of his ruin? We answer: It was not because he was rich and had plenty to eat and to wear, but because these subjects engrossed his whole attention, and tempted him to neglect the salvation

of his soul. He had his portion in this life ; with that portion he was satisfied ; and beyond that he had no serious concern. Thus Abraham tells him, " Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things." This was the root of his sin : he received the good things of this world, and did not seek the things which are unseen and eternal. It was not the use of these good things, but the abuse of them which ruined this soul. His affections were placed upon the world and not upon God. He loved and served the creature more than the Creator. He loved the gifts instead of placing his affections upon the Giver. He sought his happiness in the things of earth. He bore no cross, mortified no desire of the flesh, and neglected to seek the salvation which God had provided for him. This was his sin, and the sufficient cause of his eternal ruin. And the same has been, and will be, the cause of the eternal ruin of thousands. Merely to abstain from outward sin is not sufficient to prepare the soul for heaven. No matter what may be the purity of a man's morals, the uprightness of his outward conduct ; if he is a stranger to the inward sanctifying grace of God, he is in danger of perishing forever. Nothing less than the possession of the inward power of godliness, and an entire conformity of the heart to the spirit and mind of Christ will secure the soul's eternal bliss. Wherever this is wanting, all hopes of heaven are vain and delusive. If this rich man, who is not charged with any gross or scandalous sins of whom it is not said that he was a dishonest person, a swearer, a drunkard, a Sabbath breaker, or a liar ; if he, whose moral character is not even so much as impeached, is lost forever, merely because his affections were so placed upon the world, as to lead him to neglect the one thing needful, how vain are the hopes of thousands in the present day, who with far less of even outward morality than

this man had, are yet fondly dreaming of heaven. And how many such will be most miserably disappointed, when in the trying time of death they feel their hopes giving way before the revealing light of eternity, and ushered into the eternal world they find themselves shut up in the abodes of lost and tormented spirits. Perhaps they thought that they were in a fair way for heaven; but lo! unexpectedly they sunk down to hell. They never so much as dreamed that they were in danger of being lost. And why? O just because they were not so bad as some others; and because they were quite as good as some who were no better than themselves. This is all the foundation which many have of their expectations of future safety and happiness. They think because they are not guilty of any very great sins, and have performed some acts of charity, and said a few prayers, that all will be well at the last, and heaven will be their sure inheritance, although they may really be not half so good as this rich man. If *he* was lost forever, how much more certain will be their damnation. From all that we can learn from this account concerning this man, we may conclude that he sustained a pretty fair moral character, and perhaps paid some outward attention to the duties of religion; but he was a careless, worldly-minded man, living for this world only; destitute of those holy and spiritual affections which are necessary to prepare the soul for the enjoyment of God and heaven; and dying in this state, he was doomed to dwell in the torments of hell.

II. We now proceed to notice the punishment of this rich man. The text says, "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." This man, rich as he was, could not escape the common lot of all men. Regardless of his wealth, his rank, or his good name in the world, he was seized by the hand of

death, and removed from the midst of the pleasures of his richly furnished mansion to the miseries of his gloomy abode. He died and was buried; and very probably his funeral was pompous, as his living was grand. No doubt a costly tomb received his body; and the parade and splendour of his burial would, if possible, make his tomb appear to be a place of honourable repose. But whither, oh whither had the immortal spirit fled? and what was its condition? To this inquiry the words of the text give a mournful reply. The next news we hear of him, after the account of his death and burial, is, that "in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments." How awful the change which death produced in his condition! How sudden was his transition from pleasure to pain, and from the splendour of an earthly mansion to the fiery darkness of an eternal dungeon! See him dying upon his bed of down! Behold him next withering in the torments of everlasting burnings! Aroused from the sensual slumbers which his wealth had produced, what must have been his surprise and horror to find himself separated from God, and suddenly enveloped with the tormenting flames. Perhaps neither himself nor his friends ever so much as suspected that the way in which he had walked could have led to such a miserable place of perdition. How many dreamers of heaven will likewise find themselves at last most miserably disappointed. Just when they are expecting to rise to behold the glories of heaven, they will sink down to feel the tormenting flames of hell.

Here, then, in this account, we have the place of this rich man's confinement, and some instructions given, from which we may learn the nature of his torments. He is in hell, or in the state of separate souls. Whether or not the spirits of the dead go immediately to that place which is to be their

abode forever, we shall not pretend to decide, but it is absolutely certain, that as the souls of the faithful enter, immediately after death, into the joys of their eternal state ; so on the other hand, those who die in their sins, immediately begin to suffer the torments which they must endure forever. The final abode of the wicked is described by our Saviour as being a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, and a fire which is unquenchable. This lake of fire was undoubtedly the hell in which this man lifted up his eyes ; for he declares that the place of his abode was a place of fire : "I am tormented in these flames." Let us a little further consider attentively some of the circumstances connected with the misery of this, and every lost soul, as portrayed in this account.

1st. It is said that "he lifted up his eyes." There may be something awfully significant here intended. Perhaps he was afraid to look downwards, or around him. Beneath him he could see nothing but a frightful gulf, a bottomless and burning pit. All around him were devils and the tormented spirits of the lost, and from these scenes of surrounding woe he lifts his eyes upwards, but what does he behold ? Ah ! he beheld a sight less pleasing than any of the rest ; a sight, too, which served only to suffice the miseries of his wretched soul. No wonder then that it is said he was in torments. Below, around, and above were tormenting sights : every object that met his eyes were filled with horror, and every sound that struck his ear fell with accents of deepest woe. So the text declares not merely that he was in torment, but more expressive still, that he was *in torments*. He had woes upon woes, and all the circumstances connected with his wretched abode, and all the faculties and powers of his mind, were like so many

streams of misery, pouring their bitter waters in ceaseless floods upon his guilty soul. To a few of the circumstances which enhanced the torments of this rich man we will now briefly direct our attention, and whatever we shall find to have been the ingredients of this man's, the same will be the mixture that will fill every lost sinner's cup of sorrow. The first thing then was, "He seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom." To him this was an awful sight, indeed, and no doubt aggravated his misery in a very alarming degree. He seeth Abraham, the father of his own people, and Lazarus, who, perhaps, had belonged to the same nation with himself; *they* were in glory, *he* in hell. This is one circumstance which the Saviour told the Jews would aggravate their eternal misery, "Ye shall see Abraham and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out." We may safely conclude from this, that the reflection which the lost in hell will for ever have to endure, that many of their neighbours and friends who had no greater advantages than themselves, are saved, while they themselves are lost in consequence of their own wilful neglect, will form no small part of their torment. Parents will think upon the salvation and eternal happiness which their children are enjoying, and children will reflect that their pious parents are saved and themselves are lost. O could we go to the mouth of the pit of darkness, we would hear language sometimes like this: "O," says one, "my father and mother are in heaven, and I am shut out. I might have gone there with them but I would not." "Ah!" says another, "my children are saved and I am lost. I not only refused to be saved myself, but I did all in my power to prevent their salvation." The husband says, "My wife is happy, and I am

miserable;" and the wife in hell will think of her husband in heaven; and the brother his sister, and the sister the brother. While these sad reflections will pierce their souls like ten thousand darts, they will, in addition to these, writhe under the resistless conviction that they might have enjoyed all that weight of glory, from which, through their own fault, they are forever excluded.

2nd. A second circumstance which will enhance the misery of the damned, is the remembrance of the good things they enjoyed in this life, together with the recollection of the means of grace and the offers of salvation with which they were favoured. Thus Abraham says to the rich man, "Son remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." Remember how many opportunities you had to escape hell and prepare for heaven, but you suffered your worldly pleasure to engross your whole attention, and now you must endure the consequences. O how active will memory be in tormenting the wicked in hell! when made strong by suffering, it will read over, and forever repeat its faithful records of their whole life. Every blessing that they have received, every means of grace, and all the influences of the Holy Spirit with which they have been favoured, will there be presented in sad remembrance, and will add a most bitter ingredient to their cup of woe.

3rd. Another circumstance in the misery of this man, and of every lost sinner, is the known impossibility of ever escaping from the place of torment, and the absence of all hope of ever obtaining any alleviation of their pains. When this rich man requested that Lazarus might be sent to him with a little water to cool his burning tongue, he is informed that his request could not be granted, for two

reasons: First,—Because the season of mercy with him was forever past, and the day of recompense had come. “In thy lifetime thou hadst all these goods, but now thou art receiving the punishment due to the abuse of the favours which thou didst receive.” He tells him, too, that another reason why he could obtain no relief was, that an insuperable barrier prevented even the remotest possibility of conveying to him the small favour which he desired. Thus Abraham says, “And besides all this,” that is, in addition to the fact, that your condition is fixed, and forever unalterable; between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, who would come from thence. This will be the most awfully aggravating circumstance connected with the torments of the damned. Their torments will continue forever. As they die they will remain for ever. When once they have entered their wretched abode, there will be no possibility of obtaining any mitigation of their miseries. No friendly hand will then be reached out to afford them the least relief, and no messenger will ever be sent to point out any way of escape. The great gulf is fixed, and the irreversible decree of heaven dooms them to the bitter anguish of eternal despair. Oh! if the hope of deliverance could but reach the lost in hell, how would it illumine and cheer the gloom of their dreary abode! But no such hope will ever beam upon them, and when ages more than can be numbered have rolled away, the only prospects before them will be an eternity of torments. Upon every object that will meet their eyes will be written *eternity*. Every empest that will sweep over the sea of living fire, will proclaim the fearful reality that their torments are unreliev-

able and eternal. This circumstance will, above every other, most fearfully increase and render intolerable the torments of the damned. Sufferings, however severe, can be borne with comparative ease if there is a prospect of a final termination. But the miseries of the lost will be alleviated by no such prospect. On the contrary, the eternity of their torments, and the utter impossibility of obtaining any relief, will increase to an inconceivable extent the horrors and the woes of their condition. It is this consideration that will give the sharpest point to every sting, will place the most mournful emphasis on every complaint, and will give the strongest energy to the groans and sighs which will fill the house of woe.

4th. Another circumstance which will add to the misery of the lost, is the fearful prospect of meeting those in hell who have been their companions on earth, and whom they have injured and corrupted by their bad example. When the rich man found that he could obtain no mitigation of his torments, he asks or prays that they may not be increased. He therefore requests that Lazarus might be sent to warn his five brethren, and prevent them, if possible, from coming to that place of torment. This he did, not because he had any desire that they should be saved, but because he did not wish to see them in hell. He knew, perhaps, that they had been influenced by his bad example to neglect their souls salvation, that he had been instrumental in their ruin, and if they came to be his companions he was afraid that their upbraidings and curses would add tenfold to his already intolerable torments.

There is no doubt but that those who have been companions in sin, and who have strengthened each others hands in wickedness, will add to each others torments when they meet in the regions of the damned. Undoubtedly that man, who by the extensive influence which he exerted in society has drawn

many after him to eternal ruin, will have his torments greatly increased by the presence of those who have been the unhappy victims of his bad example, while they will forever load him with their curses, and charge him as being the guilty instrument of their damnation.

Imagine, if you can, what will be the feelings of ungodly parents when they meet their children in hell, whom they have encouraged by the powerful influence of a parent's example to neglect the salvation of their souls. How awfully will their torments be increased while they must forever listen to the bitter imprecations of their children cursing them as the authors of their ruin. There the husband will torment the wife, and the wife the husband, and all who have encouraged one another in sin and folly, will, when they meet in the world of misery, reproach each other with the most bitter and tormenting accusations.

"Ah!" says one, "there is my companion, but for whom I might have been saved. When I was serious and just ready to give up my heart to God, he pointed at me the finger of scorn, and I was led through his influence to grieve the Holy Spirit: and but for him I might now be in heaven." Oh! they each, with tongues of fire, by their curses, their accusations, and their reproaches, increase the other's woe!

5th. Lastly, in addition to all these torments of the lost, there will be their positive punishment in the flames of hell. The rich man says, "I am tormented in this flame." From this we learn that he had other torments than those inflicted by the flames of his fiery habitation. These torments will doubtless be the keen and bitter reflections of their own minds, arising from a vivid recollection of all the circumstances connected with their ruin; the privileges they once enjoyed, the opportunities they had for securing heaven, and their wilful

rejection of offered mercy and grace. Besides this, there will be the restless rage of all the unholy passions of their souls; and these will inflict torments as awful and as perpetual as if a deathless worm were forever preying upon their vitals. All the powers and faculties of their souls will then be in vigorous exercise, and each will contribute its full share to complete their torments. If such be the alarming condition of the damned, if every thing connected with the present condition and the future state of the lost will but serve to enhance their misery, how very properly does the text declare of this poor, lost, unhappy sinner, "that he was in torments."

May we never share in this misery, but may we all labour to make sure a timely escape by seeking the salvation provided for us! Amen!

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SERMON III.

THE HEAVENLY HOME.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY MANSIONS : IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU. I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU.

AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU UNTO MYSELF ; THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YE MAY BE ALSO.

JOHN xiv. 2, 3.

How solemn and affecting is the scene, when faithful and dearly beloved friends are called to part, to rend those sweet and tender ties by which they have been united, and separate from each other no more to enjoy their delightful society and intercourse. They think of the happy hours they have spent together, and of all the pleasing circumstances connected with their acquaintance and friendship, and now they reflect that these delightful associations are to be broken up, and the past scenes which afforded them such unmingled pleasure are to recur no more. How painful indeed is the separation of beloved friends, if they entertain no prospect of ever meeting again to re-enjoy the pleasure of each others' society.

The words of our text have reference to one of those impressive and memorable scenes, the anticipated parting of the disciples of the Saviour from their dearly beloved Master. In

the preceding chapter he had been speaking to them of his intended departure from the world. He told them that they would see him but a little while longer, and then he would depart from them, and they would no more enjoy the pleasure of his bodily presence to cheer, to encourage, and to instruct them. These things filled them with unfeigned sorrow. They could scarcely bear the thought of being deprived of the society of their beloved Master, for whose sake they had sacrificed all the endearments of social life, and forsaken their worldly employments. The remembrance of the happiness they had experienced, while following him, came rushing over their minds with powerful force; and they reflect, that this happiness must soon end. A gloom is cast over their fondest hopes and most pleasing prospects, and we can imagine we almost hear them saying, "Our Master is soon to leave us and what shall we do? We shall no more enjoy his company, nor hear his charming voice and his profitable conversation. We shall be left as children bereaved of a tender parent. He will no more be with us to teach us by his wisdom, to cheer us by his promises, to defend us by his power, and all our fondly cherished anticipations of sitting down with him in his kingdom must now be laid in the dust." And while they were almost overwhelmed with sorrow in expectation of losing their Master, and in him all their hopes of happiness and honour, the Saviour endeavours to soothe their afflicted minds by telling them that their sorrow would soon be turned into joy; that although he was about to leave them for a season, they would still be the objects of his tender care, and they would in a little time see him again and dwell with him forever; and he addresses them in the consoling language which commences this chapter: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my

Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

If the truth expressed in these words was well calculated to afford peculiar encouragement and delight to the first disciples of the Saviour, it is equally well adapted to all the followers of Christ, in every age and country, and is calculated to inspire them with the joyous anticipations of sooner or later following their risen and exalted Redeemer to those heavenly mansions which he has prepared for his disciples, where, free from a world of grief and sin, they shall drink from the pure river of life the overflowing streams of pleasure, and enjoy in the presence of God, and in communion with the heavenly hosts, the fullness of eternal blessedness.

1st. "In my Father's house are many mansions." The place to which our Saviour here alludes is doubtless heaven, the more immediate and peculiar residence of God, and the place designed as the future abode of happy spirits.

The apostle Paul speaks of the same place when he says, "We have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It is called a *house*, not a tent or a tabernacle merely, but a *house*, signifying a place of permanent abode. Here God himself dwells, and makes the most glorious display and the brightest manifestations of his majesty, his glory, and his goodness. Here also he has made the most ample provision for the accommodation and everlasting happiness of all who believe on the name of his only begotten Son. This place he calls his Father's house, and as his Father is the Father of all true believers, so in right of their elder Brother, they will be welcome to that house as their happy

home. Of this place the temple of God at Jerusalem, or Zion, was a very significant type. Thither all the truly faithful resorted at every opportunity to receive instruction, to worship God, and to praise him for his mercy and his goodness. This place, though glorious as the scene of the divine manifestations, and beautified by the highest efforts of human art, was nothing when compared with the glory, the splendour, and beauty of the heavenly house of which the Saviour speaks in the text. Its glory and beauty far surpass the utmost stretch of the most lively imagination to conceive; and were even the richest beauties of nature and of art placed in ornamental array in the most splendid earthly palace, they would give us but a faint representation of the dazzling splendour and unearthly grandeur of our Father's house above. There will be the absence of all imperfection and deformity; and the presence of everything that can add to its beauty, and all the glory and magnificent splendour of that house will concur to complete the supreme and perfect felicity of its inhabitants.

In this house, the text further says, "there are many mansions." It is thought by some that our Lord here alludes to the various apartments in the temple, and the vast number of people that lodged there. Perhaps the allusion, in a more general sense, may be to the palaces of kings, and the various apartments which they contained for the accommodation of the domestics, and the numerous persons belonging to the royal court. The original term here used, literally translated, signifies, quiet and continued abodes. Our Saviour here intends to afford encouragement and comfort to his disciples, by assuring them, that in the place to which he was going before them, there was ample room to receive them, and everything prepared to accommodate them in the most delightful manner. These many mansions spoken of in the text are doubtless

designed to teach us, that in heaven there is sufficient room for the millions of redeemed and blood-washed spirits who shall finally inherit that happy place as their everlasting home. So ample is that place, or to use the figure of the text, so numerous are those heavenly mansions, that no one faithful soul will lack for room, or want any of the accommodations necessary to render his happiness complete. All will find mansions there prepared for their reception, none will be left to wander homeless and destitute. The people of God, while in this world, are many of them afflicted and poor, and like their Divine Master, have not any place to lay their head which they may call their own; but in heaven it will not be so. Poor as they may have been in this world, in the heavenly mansions in their Father's house they will have a splendid dwelling, and everything that their hearts can desire. They belong to the royal family of the King of kings, and they will finally inhabit the many mansions of the heavenly palace, and enjoy all the riches, the glory, and the bliss of their delightful abode. The glory of these heavenly mansions far surpasses our most vivid conceptions. Imagine for a moment you behold an earthly palace, beautified with all the ornaments that the highest efforts of art can produce and furnished with the richest provisions and dainties, that the most fruitful climate affords, and you have but a faint and imperfect representation of the heavenly mansions in which the followers of the Saviour shall hereafter dwell.

This place is to be their abode forever. Here they are but pilgrims and sojourners, dwelling a while in tents below, and wandering to and fro, but in heaven they will have a permanent and everlasting home, imperishable as the throne of God itself, and durable as the days of eternity. Thither will be gathered the saints of every age and country. Each will take

possession of his celestial mansion, and there he will abide forever.

The Saviour not only tells them that there are many mansions in his Father's house, but he gives them the positive assurance of it in order to remove all doubt and uncertainty. "If it were not so, I would have told you before." I saw you forsake your worldly employments to follow me in hope of obtaining a reward; and if there had been no reward for my disciples, I would have told you immediately, and would not have suffered you to be deceived by false hopes and delusive expectations. I would not have encouraged you to follow me at the loss of all things, if I had not an eternal recompense to bestow upon you. The sincerity of my affection for you would have prevented me from deceiving you; and if there were no mansions in my Father's house where you might dwell forever, or if there had been none for you, I would long ago have told you. The disciples of the Saviour in every age and country have the best of reasons for the hopes of a future rest which they entertain. The ground of their hopes is the goodness and unchangeable veracity of God.

He cannot lie, nor can he deceive or disappoint the expectations of those who trust in him. He has prepared a glorious place of habitation for all who obey him in truth and sincerity, and all the promises he has given to his faithful servants encourage them to expect, that when the days of their earthly pilgrimage are numbered and over, that they will be admitted to the house not made with hands, and dwell in the presence of their exalted Redeemer and glorious Creator, and with him in their heavenly home enjoy the fullness of eternal joys. This everlasting reward is secured to them by the faithful promises of God; by those promises none of which can ever fail until all are fulfilled; and sooner shall heaven and earth

pass away than the hopes of the followers of Christ be cut off. To all he gives the assurance that they are the heirs of that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God through faith until the day appointed for administering unto the heirs of immortality, an entrance into their happy and everlasting home; and although they cannot see with the natural eye the mansions of glory prepared for them, yet they may rest fully assured that there is a heavenly house waiting to receive them whenever this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved. To all his faithful followers the Saviour still says: "If it were not so, I would have told you." You need not fear of being disappointed at last. There are many mansions in my Father's house, and there are mansions for you. If you continue faithful until death, you shall be admitted into them, and enjoy to all eternity the pleasures and delights prepared for you in your heavenly home.

But he further informs his disciples, that one cause of his leaving them was to prepare a place in those mansions, and make it ready for their reception: I go to prepare a place for you; and so far from sorrowing on account of my intended departure, you ought to rejoice and be exceeding glad, because my short absence from you will be to you eternal gain. You should not consider my departure as an evidence of any want of affection on my part towards you, seeing that the very reason why I am going to leave you for a season is on your own account. You can stay but a short time in this world, soon you must leave it; and I am only going a little while before you to prepare for you an eternal home.

There is probably here an allusion to the custom of kings and princes, and sometimes of illustrious noblemen; when about to visit or remove to another country, they sent servants

or courtiers before them to prepare for their accommodation, who having made the necessary preparations returned in order to conduct their masters thither.

Our Saviour here represents himself as a forerunner, going before to prepare a place for the reception of his disciples. In this character he is also represented by Paul, in the epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." Again he says: "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these; for Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;" and it is in this sense we are doubtless to understand him as preparing a place for his people. He consecrated the heavenly place by the shedding of his blood, or by the atoning sacrifice of himself he has removed every obstruction out of the way of the entrance into the heavenly mansions, and made the most ample provision to fit man, depraved as he is, to dwell forever in the presence of God. And it may very properly be said, that he has gone to prepare a place for his people, because, as the great High Priest of the human family, he has ascended to the right hand of God, where he ever liveth to make intercession for them. He is there exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. He pleads the merits of his death on their behalf; he sends down the Holy Spirit to enlighten, to convince, to convert, and to sanctify those who will accept his grace. He prepares a place for all who believe on his name and become his disciples, by preparing them for a place in heaven through the sanctifying influences of his Spirit,

making them meet for an inheritance among the saints in light. It is for this purpose that he has ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God, there to make intercession for the purchase of his blood, and to shed down those heavenly influences which purify the hearts of those who believe on his name, and fit them, by true holiness, to dwell in the mansions of immortal blessedness in the better house above. And that work of grace which he carries on in the world, in effecting the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of believers, is the work which he, as the Saviour of the world, has gone away into heaven to accomplish. This is, doubtless, the real meaning of what he said to his disciples. I go to prepare a place for you. And he declared to his disciples, on another occasion, that it was expedient for them that he should go away in order that they might receive the Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, whom he would send as the Great Agent to prepare them for their home in heaven.

But he gives his disciples the assurance that when he should have accomplished the object of his absence, he would return again, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Ye need not be overcome with sorrow; my absence from you will be but short, and all that time I shall be employed in preparing for you a place where you may dwell with me forever, without ever again having to feel the sorrows of separation. For I will come again and receive you to myself.

The idea of a forerunner is here still preserved, who after he had prepared for the entertainment of a guest, used to return in order to introduce him into the place prepared for him.

This coming again of the Saviour ultimately, refers to his solemn appearance at the last day to receive all his servants

into the kingdom of eternal glory, and to put them in possession of their full reward in heaven. Yet this admits of a more particular application ; and the death of every faithful Christian may be regarded as the coming of the Saviour to bring him home. Heaven is the home of the faithful believer, death is the period which terminates his trials, and introduces him into the presence of his adorable Redeemer, and to the heavenly mansions prepared to receive his ransomed spirit. With this consideration of the nature of death, under what a pleasing aspect does it present itself to the faithful Christian. He views it not as a real enemy, but as a welcome friend ; not as an angry summons, but as a pleasing message from his dearest friend. He looks upon it, not as the extinguisher of his hopes, but as the opening dawn of his brightest expectations. In a word, he views death as the promised return of the Saviour to receive him to himself : and while waiting in patient expectation of his coming, he can sing with the poet :

"Surely he will not long delay :
I hear his spirit cry,
Arise, my love, make haste away !
Go, get thee up, and die.
O'er death, who now has lost his sting,
I give thee victory,
And with me my reward I bring,
I bring my heaven for thee."

And why should the Christian fear to die, since death to him is nothing less than the coming of his Saviour to receive him to the heavenly mansions. Ah ! said an old saint when about to die, who was asked if he was afraid of death ; " Afraid of death ! " he replied, " what would you think of a person who had travelled hundreds of miles in order to visit his dearest friend, and after he had accomplished his journey and arrived at the door of his friend, should then be afraid to enter ? Do you think that after I have travelled so many years in

order to reach my heavenly home, now that my Saviour has come to open the door and receive me, I should be afraid to enter? No, no. I have not so learned Christ." And with the joyful confidence of this dying saint, may every Christian view the scene of death as his entrance to his heavenly home. "That where I am, there ye may be also." The mansions prepared for the disciples are the dwellings of the Saviour himself. There shall be the Master and the servant together. To understand the peculiar force of this, we must remember that in Eastern countries the servants were admitted into the apartments of their masters only to perform the duties of a servant's office, or when they had some special business. But the Saviour says, Where I am, there shall my servants be. They shall dwell in his presence and enjoy his society continually.

Are we the disciples of the Saviour? and are we giving all diligence to purify ourselves even as he is pure, so that when he shall appear we may be like him, and see him as he is?

May the Lord grant that we may be found faithful servants, always waiting for his coming! Amen.

SERMON IV.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED THE POWER OF GOD, AND THE WISDOM OF GOD.
1 CORINTHIANS, i. 24.

THE manner of the Divine procedure, in all the operations of his providence, is to accomplish the greatest effects by the most simple means that can possibly be employed with success. Nor is this mode of operation adopted, because of any want of an abundance of materials at the disposal of the omnipotent Producer of all things, but results solely from the perfection of that wisdom which views at a single glance all the possibilities of events, and which will never employ complicated means when those which are most simple will accomplish the same desired end. The Lord seeth not as man seeth, and it is generally the case that those plans in which the highest exercise of infinite wisdom is displayed for the purpose of effecting an important design, appear in the estimation of men to be not only insufficient, but even under the aspect of foolishness. This has been the case especially with respect to the manner in which the great and glorious work of human redemption has been accomplished. Although in this work there is really

the most brilliant manifestation of all the perfections of Jehovah, yet it has ever been regarded by man, while under the darkening and perverting influence of his fallen nature, with indifference and contempt, as displaying none of those characteristics of wisdom which any system should possess in order to receive the approval of a rational intelligence. The doctrine of Christ crucified, as the means of the salvation of a perishing world, was, perhaps, the most unwelcome and repulsive that could have been preached in the days of the apostles, and the people amongst whom they commenced their labours. To the Jews this doctrine was a stumbling block. Salvation, through a crucified Saviour, was a doctrine which struck a death-blow at the foundation of all their fond hopes of civil liberty and temporal grandeur and prosperity. They looked for a Messiah who was to sit upon the throne of David, and in the progress of his illustrious achievements, was to deliver them from the Roman yoke and raise them to a pre-eminent position amongst the nations of the earth. But how it was possible that he who was put to death as a malefactor could fulfill their expectations, they could not possibly understand. To the polished and philosophical Greeks this doctrine appeared to be nothing less than foolishness, when compared with their own systems of religion and philosophy in which they gloried, and of which they made their boast. Accustomed to the parade and splendour of their own ceremonies and performances, they were always apt to conclude that no great effects could be produced where there was not a splendid display connected with the means to be employed. Hence they regarded the agents employed in preaching the doctrine of Christ crucified as foolish and presumptuous in the extreme, that they should suppose, even for a moment, that the great end at which the Gospel aimed could be accomplished by the use of means apparently so simple

and devoid of power. But while to these two classes of persons the doctrine of the Cross presented itself, to the one as a stumbling block, and to the other as foolishness, and from both met with a most hearty rejection, to those who were called of God, and who permitted the light of Divine truth to make a discovery of their real, miserable, and perishing condition, it appeared under a different aspect, as being the brightest display of the power and the wisdom of God. To the brief consideration of these two topics our attention will be directed.

I. We are to consider, first, the doctrine of "Christ Crucified" as a glorious manifestation of the power of God. The great truth that man has destroyed himself, though repulsive to the pride of our fallen nature, is one which is deeply felt, and its consequences fearfully anticipated by every truly awakened and penitent soul.

Created for the enjoyment of pure and spiritual pleasures, and an heir to all the honours, joys, ennobling and dignified employments of which his nature renders him capable, through his disobedience he has lost all that he once possessed, and in his fallen state he has become an heir of misery; the slave of sin and Satan; the unhappy victim of fierce and discordant passions; a criminal, tormented with the perpetual apprehension of future punishment; a punishment which includes in itself the loss of all that is really valuable to the immortal spirit, and the positive infliction of all that can conduce to render it completely and forever miserable. Not only has man thus destroyed himself by his sins, but he is also utterly unable to effect his own recovery. None of them, says the Psalmist, can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him. He has contracted guilt for which he cannot atone; he has drawn upon himself miseries which he cannot avoid; forged for himself chains of bondage which he cannot break,

and exposed himself to dangers from which neither his own wisdom nor strength can furnish him with any way or means to escape.

Whence, then, we may inquire, shall his salvation proceed? and how is he to be rescued from his guilt, his misery, and danger? We answer, in accordance with the language of the text, the doctrine of Christ crucified directs our attention to the only sure foundation of a sinner's hope, and furnishes us with a manifestation of that stupendous display of the power of God, which is the only means of the salvation of a perishing world. We here learn that salvation is of God, by the exertion of his omnipotence through the medium of a crucified Redeemer. Let us then for a moment examine the moral efficiency of the doctrine of Christ crucified as displayed in the salvation of sinners. That it is eminently the power of God to salvation to all of every name and nation who comply with its requirements, is equally true, whether we consider its effects as produced upon individuals in particular, or upon mankind collectively. Let us take for example the case of an awakened sinner, labouring under the consciousness of the divine displeasure, which he has incurred by his sins, and tormented with the most fearful apprehensions of future misery in the eternal world. By what means shall he be delivered from his guilty fears, or to what resource shall he flee to obtain that assurance of safety which is absolutely necessary to quiet the alarming apprehensions of his mind? If a Jew, he might endeavour to find an antidote for his fears in the observance of the ceremonies, or the practice of the duties of the law, and thus attempt to create in his heart the hope of eternal life. If a Greek, he might resort to their systems of ethical philosophy, their defective morality, and idolatrous religion, and by some, or all of these means seek rest for his burdened or disquieted

spirit, and a defence against anticipated future evils. But alas ! all these would be of no avail. The law would pronounce its curse upon the Jew, and would but serve to increase rather than quiet his fears, and impose a more weighty burden instead of removing the load from his sinking soul. It spoke to him in language which neither offered the deliverance he sought, nor breathed the slightest emotion of compassion : " By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." The pretended wisdom of the Greeks, instead of directing its votaries to the attainment of true and permanent happiness, shed only a deeper gloom upon the moral destiny of man, and served rather to perplex and bewilder those who were influenced by its precepts, than to guide them into the way of peace. The world, by all its boasted wisdom, never furnished a solution to the problem, How shall man be just to his Maker ? It never answered that question of all absorbing interest to the immortal soul, What shall I do to be saved ? Inquire we of the law ? its answer is a curse. Or do we go to seek a response from the once-thought omniscient oracles of Greece and Rome ? their silence proclaims their ignorance. But when from every other source salvation has been sought in vain, the doctrine of Christ crucified comes to our relief, unfolds the mystery of human redemption, and presents us with the omnipotence of Jehovah as the foundation of our hope. Here is help laid upon one who is mighty and able to save to the uttermost. Is the awakened sinner weighed down under a consciousness of having contracted an enormous amount of guilt ? In Christ crucified he is brought to the very throne of the Majesty of Heaven, and receives a free pardon from the Supreme Authority. Is his soul disquieted with alarming apprehensions of impending judgments for his iniquities ? in the doctrine of the Cross, he hears a voice which dissipates all his fears, and enables him

to look up with confidence, and in hope to behold his inheritance in heaven. Christ crucified is to him the power of God to salvation from condemnation, from misery, and future woe.

Behold again that wretched slave of every vice, taken captive by the devil at his will, and the unhappy victim of the fiercest passions that agitate the fallen soul; the pest of society, and a source of sorrow to all with whom he may associate. View again that same individual, but under another character, transformed and renewed in the spirit of his mind; meek and humble in his disposition, possessing in his heart a peace which passeth understanding, and his whole soul breathing good will to all mankind. We ask for the cause of this wonderful change, and the source from which have proceeded the elements of this moral transformation. Shall we find it in the inventions of men? No: nor in the strongest combinations of human power; nor in the highest efforts of human skill. The utmost stretch of man's wisdom never yet succeeded in devising a plan for breaking the weakest chains of the sinner's bondage, or for transforming the tamest passion of his fallen soul. The preaching of Christ crucified unfolds the mysterious source of his salvation, and the almighty agency employed in accomplishing the glorious work of his spiritual regeneration. It is the power of God. It is this that opens his eyes and turns him from darkness to light, delivers him from the power of Satan and from the dominion of his unholy appetites and passions; restores his captive soul to spiritual freedom, and to the enjoyment of those permanent pleasures which are the delightful foretastes of his future bliss in heaven.

But there is also in the doctrine of Christ crucified a glorious display of the power of God, if we examine its effects in reference to the people of God in their diversified circumstances of trial and affliction. This has been the foundation of the

hope of all the pious in every age, and the unfailing source of those inspiring joys which animated their hearts, and sustained them in the performance of their heroic deeds while contending against the hostile legions of the world. Here we find the secret source which supported the courage, and kindled the zeal of the Apostles of the Saviour, which bore them up triumphant over all the opposition of their enemies, and rendered them victorious and even more than conquerors, while in appearance suffering the loss of all things. Sustained by the divine power displayed in the doctrine of Christ crucified, the martyrs have met death in its most terrific forms, and without the shadow of a fear have ascended in triumph from the scene of their fiercest conflict to their final rest in heaven.

The last enemy of man is death, but even from the terrific aspect of this foe, the doctrine of Christ crucified furnishes the believer with an effectual antidote. Job could say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," &c. : Job xix. 25-27. The Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," &c. : Psa. xxiii. 4. The Apostle Paul, "I am now ready to be offered," &c. 2 Timothy iv. 6.

But do you wish for a practical manifestation of the power of God, as displayed in the doctrine of Christ crucified in the salvation of sinners, even in the very last extremity of their earthly existence, and under the most trying circumstances, go and witness the death-bed scene of that timid sister, who, perhaps, in the full vigour of youthful health, would start at the sound of the most gentle rustling of the leaf moved by the softest evening breeze. What would you *expect* to behold? Female tenderness yielding to shivering fear in the presence of the grim monster death? You see, instead, heroic courage advancing in triumph to meet the last, and that a *conquered*, enemy. Does she shrink from the final contest with the king

of terrors? No: but hear her call for the speedy approach of her foe:

"Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, O quit this mortal frame;
Trembling, *hoping*, LINGERING, FLYING,
O the pain, the bliss of dying!"

She perhaps sometimes trembled in the anticipation that the last struggle would exceed the measure of her strength; but now that the hour has come, and all her fears are dissipated, in joyful surprise she inquires:

"Tell me, my soul, can this be death?"

Can this be death? so different from what I expected? Why, I thought it would appear to me as the king of terrors, but it comes as a messenger of peace, whose approach I can hail with joy. I once thought that my courage would fail me at the most distant appearance of the grim monster; but now, in delightful composure, I await his last grasp, and—

"Sink in blissful dreams away,
And visions of eternal day."

And while we witness this scene of holy triumph, we ask the secret of that mysterious power which enables the weakness of fallen humanity to triumph over its final foe. Why is it that we behold a timid female approaching death, not only without the shadow of a rising fear, but even with all the courage that the hero of a thousand battles marches at the head of his well-tried legions to meet an inferior and cowardly foe? We answer, that the doctrine of Christ crucified reveals to us the secret source of that strength which sustains, and that courage which inspires, the dying saint with the ability to shout with expiring breath, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Remove this, the only sure foundation of the sinner's hopes, and you leave him, like Noah's dove, without the shadow of a

place on which he will dare to set the sole of his foot. Break off this horn from the altar of God, and there is none other to which he can cling to save himself from the avenger of blood. Take away this sun, whose rays are beginning to gild his celestial horizon, and you translate the dying saint from the full morning light of heaven's own perfect day, to darkness, dense and dreary as the midnight of eternity. O it is the doctrine of the Cross that is the power of God to the salvation of the soul in the hour of death! This is the sun to illumine and cheer the valley of the shadow of death; the true polar star to guide him into the haven of his desired rest. This is the sword and the shield of the Christian soldier. Equipped with the armour of righteousness, through faith in the blood of the cross, and strengthened by the omnipotence of Jehovah, he is enabled to shout in the language of the conqueror, laden with the spoils of victory: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." We have not only conquered the enemy, but we have also seized the crown, and taken possession of the kingdom. Christ crucified, then, is indeed the power of God to salvation in every stage of the progress of the soul, from the lowest degree of degradation until it reaches its highest point of elevation in the heavens. At whatever period in the progressive work of a sinner's salvation we enquire for the cause of this mysterious moral transformation of the fallen soul, we hear but one reply, Christ crucified is the power of God to his salvation. Take him dead in trespasses and sins, Christ crucified furnishes him with the elements of a new life. View him as a self-destroyer, Christ crucified is to him the power of God as the agent of a new creation. Behold him sitting in the dense darkness of moral night; from the cross, as a centre, radiate those beams which shed into the dungeon of his soul the incipient splendours of the light of heaven. But consider

him under whatever circumstances you may, in prosperity or in adversity, laden with guilt or with a conscience void of offence, in the full vigour of health or wasted by the ravages of disease, in time or in eternity, it is equally true, that Christ crucified is the power of God to his salvation.

Nor is the doctrine of Christ crucified less eminently the power of God to salvation, if we consider its effects upon mankind collectively, or upon the nations of the earth.

The Apostles could speak of the moral efficiency of this doctrine from what they had witnessed of its effects. Consider for a moment the condition of the world at the time when they commenced their labours. It was divided into two great classes called Jews and Gentiles, both equally indisposed, though for different reasons, to receive the doctrines of the gospel. The Jews were most firmly attached to the rites and ceremonies of the religion of their fathers, and filled with a fiery zeal against everything that might come in contact with their opinions and fond expectations of worldly grandeur. The Gentiles were almost wholly given to the most debasing idolatry, involved in the deepest moral gloom, and sunk into the lowest state of misery to which the unrestrained exercise of the fiercest passions of fallen nature could reduce them. Now, although the Apostles had to contend with the bigotry and corrupt traditional opinions of the Jewish people, and with the venerable and fondly cherished superstitions of the heathen world, yet they went forth in their work without the aid of human learning, of wealth, or the influence of civil or military power. The message they bore was of the most unwelcome nature; the doctrine they preached, in addition to being most offensive to the pride of fallen nature, was especially displeasing to their Jewish and Grecian or Gentile hearers, and one most likely not only to be utterly rejected by them, but also to excite their

fiercest indignation. Christ crucified was the subject of their preaching wherever they went and to whomsoever they preached. Here, then, were a few individuals of obscure origin, commencing an aggressive movement against the combined hostility of the world, making an attempt to uproot the customs and opinions which had received the sanction of a long succession of ages. Human reason would have condemned the enterprise as rash and foolish in the extreme. But witness the result. They opened their mission under a most glorious manifestation of the power of God, as displayed in the doctrine of Christ crucified. The scenes of Pentecost revealed to an astonished multitude the moral efficiency of that engine which was finally to move a world lying in spiritual death. Nor were the first effects of the preaching of this doctrine more astonishing and glorious than those which followed the successive ministrations of the Apostles. Wherever they went, they saw the displays of the power of God. Signs and wonders followed in their track; the bigotry of Jewish prejudice yielded to the overwhelming manifestations of Divine power; the haughtiness of Roman pride bowed and submitted to wear the yoke of him who is meek and lowly in heart; the idols of the heathen disappeared in rapid succession, and the knees of nations bowed to the name of Jesus and yielded to the sceptre of the cross. Who would have thought that by the use of means, apparently so simple and powerless, such astonishing effects would have been produced? Who would have believed that twelve men, few, perhaps none, of whom sustained any higher rank in society than that of fishermen, could have continued for any length of time to publish, even in the most obscure places of the Roman empire, a message of such an offensive nature as the one with which they were entrusted? Last of all, would the idea have been entertained that these men would preach the

doctrine of a crucified Saviour in Jerusalem itself, the representative of Jewish bigotry; in Rome, the proud and luxurious metropolis of universal empire; and in Athens and Corinth, the seats of the arts and sciences, and the universities of the civilized world. But what does history testify? Why it teaches us that the very first sermon they preached was in Jerusalem; and that, too, while the hands of the murderers of the Messiah were yet stained with his blood. Witness the result: even in Jerusalem, the guilty repository of all the righteous blood that had been shed from that of Abel, three thousand marked with the blood of the Just One were made the willing subjects of grace through faith in the blood of the cross. And from that time how rapidly did the Gospel spread, bearing down all opposition in its progress, until the banners of the cross waved in triumph over the throne of the Cæsars, and Rome, powerful in arms, was forced to confess the superior power of the Gospel. Here we see the effects—do we inquire for the cause by which they were produced? We answer,—Not by the might, nor by the power of human ingenuity, but by the power of the living God. The apostles went forth and preached everywhere, and the Lord wrought with them, and confirming the word with signs following. (Mark 16: 20.) This was the secret of their success. The power of God was employed to render the weapons of their warfare mighty and successful in pulling down the strongest holds of the prince of darkness, casting down the lofty imaginations of the proud, uprooting the long established superstitions of the heathen, and transforming the face of the moral world from the dreariness of a wintry desolation, to the blossom, beauty, and fertility of a perpetual spring. And Christ crucified is the same in its efficiency and absolute necessity as it was in the days of apostolic labour and success.

No other name has yet been found, no other means devised, by which man can obtain salvation.

In the march of scientific and intellectual improvement, discoveries have been made which have greatly cheapened and multiplied the comforts of mankind, but for their salvation no new provision has been made. The light of science has not shed one ray to illumine the dungeon of the human soul. Among the new and useful elements which have been discovered in the improvement of modern chemical science, none have been found which furnish the dead sinner with the elements of a new life, or the agent of his spiritual renovation. The boasted spiritual power arrogated by those who lay claim to that baseless fabric of a disordered vision, an uninterrupted succession of apostolical authority, and the encomiums which we frequently hear concerning the soul-saving virtues of certain church forms, and ceremonies and modes of worship, are all nothing less than so many sad evidences of the proneness of fallen nature to forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to itself the broken and leaky cisterns of human inventions. All must fail; when the overflowing scourge shall come from the presence of the Lord, every refuge of lies will be swept away. Christ crucified is the power of God. This is a truth which is the same in its importance and necessity in every age, and throughout every department of human society. Go we to the most enlightened and polished circles of civilized society? we tell them that Christ crucified is their only hope. Do we preach to the benighted cannibals who dwell in the habitations of cruelty? we point them to the bleeding victim of the cross, and tell them that he alone has power to save; we tell the victims of imposture that Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life."

While pursuing our way over the spiritual deserts of our earth, we proclaim to every parched and thirsty pilgrim we meet, that he who believes in the crucified Saviour, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water ; and we declare to all of every name, nation, and country, that he is able to save even to the uttermost.

II. The second part of this subject leads us to notice the plan of salvation, through a crucified Saviour, as a glorious display of the wisdom of God. In the works of man, power and wisdom are not always combined, but in the divine scheme of human redemption we are presented with a stupendous display of power, together with the highest degree of wisdom, in the most admirable adaptation of the means to the end to be accomplished. One reason why all the schemes fail devised by the efforts of human ingenuity for mitigating the sorrows of mankind, and raising them to the enjoyment of those elevated pleasures after which the soul aspires, is because the world by its wisdom never yet understood the real nature of man, never yet determined the position he was designed to occupy in the scale of intellectual and moral existence, and much less could human wisdom ever point out the pathway to the skies. Man's moral relations were never known until revealed by infinite wisdom. Human reason never discovered the true nature of man's spiritual disease, and consequently could not apply a proper remedy. How shall I be saved, is a question which not even the angels in heaven could answer, much less man whose dwelling is in the dust.

Now the wisdom of God as displayed in the plan of human redemption through Christ crucified, appears in the most admirable adaptation of the plan to the purpose, or of the means to the end to be accomplished. It commences the

work of salvation at the very point where the ruin of man originated, or, in other words, it applies the remedy to the very seat of the disease. It is here especially that all the schemes of men's devising have been most signally defective. They have mistaken the seat as well as the nature of the evil, and have directed an external application, instead of giving an internal remedy. Hence, while they have bound up, and chafed, and amputated some of the external parts, they have left the disease to fester and rankle within, only to break forth with an increased violence and malignancy. Damming up the stream, instead of drying up the fountain, the momentary stagnation of its waters will but serve to accumulate their quantity and augment their force, until breaking down the barrier by which their progress has been temporarily arrested, they sweep away all before them. This is but a true picture of even the wisest plans that men have formed. They have chained and starved the lion, until aroused in the majesty of his mighty indignation to the unrestrained exertion of all his strength, he breaks from his bondage to rage, to rave, and destroy. But how different the course which infinite wisdom pursues. Let us suppose for a moment the case of a person hearing for the first time the doctrine of Christ crucified. He hears it with amazement. What ! Christ, the Son of God, his only and beloved Son, crucified ; dying in a manner which signifies that the crime for which he suffered ranks the highest in the catalogue of offences ? No, he died the just for the unjust ; the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Did he die for sinners of the human race ? then I am one of the guilty authors of his death, for I am one of the members of the human family, a partaker of their common nature, bearing all the marks of the common character which they

possess, the faithful imitator of their practices, and consequently I am responsible for the consequences of their conduct. Oh! alarming thought! I the murderer of the Prince of life! Is this indeed true? Let me consider. Can I not claim the part of only an accomplice in the deed? No, no: he tasted death for every man, and I am individually held responsible as a principal in the crime. O wretched man that I am!" Now here is the point to which we wish to come; the doctrine of Christ crucified comes home to the very heart of the sinner, and gives him to feel the truth in all its power and alarming consequences, that he has acted the part not merely of an accomplice, but that of a chief in a conspiracy in which the whole honour of the Divine government is concerned, and which has resulted in the death of his *only* begotten Son, and that he is held individually as fully responsible for the crucifixion of the Son of God, as though he were the *only* sinner for whom he had suffered. Here, then, my friends, is burning truth, which falls upon the naked heart of the sinner, and begets the elements of a deep and genuine repentance towards God. See him there gazing upon the lacerated and wounded body of the suffering victim, and with eyes suffused in tears, and a faltering voice, he asks,—

"Who, who, my Saviour this hath done?
 Who could thy sacred body wound?
 No guilt thy spotless heart hath known;
 No guile hath in thy lips been found.
 I, I alone have done the deed;
 'Tis I thy sacred flesh have torn;
 My sins have caused thee, Lord, to bleed,
 Pointed the nail and fixed the thorn."

He is not willing now even to admit that he has any associates to share with him in the awful responsibility of the consequences of his conduct. Behold an astonishing display

of the wisdom of God. The heart of the sinner loves sin; but the very first view he takes of the cross fills him with horror, gives him such a discovery of the nature of his conduct as is sufficient to lead to a sincere heartfelt repentance, thus striking a death blow at the root of the evil, and removing the cause by which all the effects have been produced. It is here that we find the real nature of an evangelical repentance, in the discovery which the sinner receives through the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, that he has acted a personal part in this awful tragedy; that the Saviour was wounded for his transgressions, and bruised for his iniquities; thus extorting the cry of genuine penitence, "Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned." The misery and ruin which he has brought upon himself are only a secondary consideration. All is lost in the awful truth that his sins have crucified the only begotten Son of God. And can the awakened sinner, thus viewing his sins, continue with careless indifference to pursue his guilty and ruinous practices? No, no. For while the view which he takes of his conduct begets a hearty repentance towards God, it is equally effectual in leading him to forsake his evil ways. What! sin again, and crucify my Saviour afresh? No, never will I again put forth my hand to pluck of that forbidden fruit.

But let us view this subject further, and see how most gloriously the wisdom of God is displayed through the whole process of the sinner's salvation, in a way that while it secures all the glory to God, it meets all the peculiarities of the effects of the fall, and saves the sinner in a manner that confers on him the greatest amount of happiness here and hereafter.

Man fell through pride; but in his salvation through a crucified Redeemer, he is humbled into the very dust, and required to repent as in sackcloth and ashes. He has destroyed himself by his guilty misconduct; but he is saved by the

worthiness of another; his ruin commenced in entertaining an improper desire for knowledge; but in his salvation through Christ crucified he is required to renounce his own wisdom, and to become a fool in his own estimation, that he may be truly wise. He fell through unbelief; he is saved by faith. He was ruined through a presumptuous dependence on the suggestions of the father of lies; he obtains salvation by an humble and sole reliance upon another, and that the very person whom his sins have crucified. Now, the great point aimed at in the salvation of man is to destroy his self-love, and to replace his affections upon God, their proper object. And see how wisely the plan of salvation through Christ crucified is adapted to accomplish this purpose. At every point of his salvation through Christ he is charged with the guilt of his own ruin, while, at the same time, he sees that the whole work of his recovery from first to last is of God, through Christ, thus hiding all pride from his eyes, and binding every affection of his soul upon God, leading him to exclaim at all times, in language of the most tender filial affection, "We love him because he first loved us."

But again, the wisdom of God appears in the doctrine of Christ crucified, in that while there is a most signal manifestation of the inflexible justice of God, there is also a most glorious display of his love.

To have pardoned the sinner without requiring any satisfaction for his past offences, might have appeared like a want of proper regard for his own laws, and as giving encouragement to sin; and to have demanded satisfaction from the guilty sinner himself, who had nothing to offer, would seem to be an unreasonable requirement. But in Christ crucified every peculiarity of the case is fully met. Justice required either the death of the guilty sinner himself or that of a proper

substitute ; but when the sinner had nothing to offer, the love of God is seen in providing a proper victim of sacrifice by the incarnation of his only begotten Son. Thus while in the death of Christ the justice of God is most signally displayed in the punishment of sin, the goodness of God is equally displayed in giving his only begotten Son to bear the iniquities of all mankind, and thus in the very provision for the salvation of the world, there is a manifestation of the greatest hatred to sin, and yet the greatest love to the sinner. There is seen inflexible justice inflicting the penalty, and yet saving the criminal ; pardoning the sinner without relaxing the claims of the law ; and, at the same time, doing it in such a manner as to secure his future obedience, and binding the once rebellious subject in eternal loyalty to his throne.

But once more. Who could have conceived the idea of making the very victim of the sinner's crimes the object of his trust for salvation ? Every time the sinner receives an offer of salvation through Christ crucified, he is presented with the most appalling view of the nature of his sins ; he is charged with being the betrayer and murderer of the Prince of Life, and yet that very Saviour is declared to be the only foundation of a sure and certain hope of eternal life. Human wisdom might pronounce a plan like this most absurd, and calculated most certainly to defeat the very end it aimed to accomplish ; and instead of encouraging the exercise of a saving trust in Christ, would rather tend to drive him to despair. Well might the doctrine of the cross be regarded as foolishness by the philosophical Greeks. But see here a glorious manifestation of the unsearchable wisdom of God. For while the sinner hears that his sins have crucified the Saviour, he is also assured that he died a willing sacrifice in the place of the guilty criminal, that he died for the very purpose of saving the sinner

from death. He received the stroke of justice that it might not light on his soul. Thus while he sees in Christ crucified the hatred of God to sin, he is also furnished with a most encouraging manifestation of his love to the sinner, and he rushes into the very arms of that bleeding Saviour whom his sins have pierced, and he trusts for pardon and salvation in the merits of that blood which his own sins have shed. He sees in the pierced body of Christ the fearful nature of sin, and a most awful manifestation of Divine justice, which could not suffer sin to go unpunished, and yet he beholds the bowels of the Saviour's compassion yearning over a perishing race, and love which the most cruel treatment could not abate, leading him to the cross a willing sacrifice even for his enemies. While in beholding the cross he sees the punishment his own sins have merited, he sees also that punishment endured by another for his sake; and assured of the compassion of the crucified Saviour, and his willingness to save even the very chief of sinners, he casts his soul upon him in humble confidence, and claims him as his Saviour and all. Christ crucified is then the wisdom as well as the power of God. He is not only a sufficient, but a suitable Saviour. The sinner who believes on Christ is saved, and that, too, in a manner that displays both the omnipotence and the infinite wisdom of God.

But there is another point upon which we may dwell for a moment. The Apostle says that the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. Now, although it is not the order of Providence to swerve from his plans for the purpose of gratifying the improper desires of his creatures, yet we may see the perfection of the plan of salvation through Christ crucified, in its most admirable adaptation to meet all the peculiarities of human nature. Did the Jews require a sign? they had them in abundance, and such signs, too, as were

sufficient to satisfy every request. They had them not only in the miracles performed by the Saviour himself, but also in the astonishing effects produced by the preaching of the Apostles. The day of Pentecost was a day of signs and wonders, and the events of that memorable period were sufficient to satisfy even the most incredulous, and set an unquestionable seal to the divinity of the Messiah's mission. Do we require a sign, or some convincing proof of the divinity of our religious faith? we have it in the effects produced by the preaching of Christ crucified.

The Greeks seek after wisdom; and here it is to be found in its perfection; wisdom, too, compared with which the wisdom of the world is perfect foolishness. The wisdom of God, as seen in the plan of salvation, engages the intense interest of angels and archangels, who find it a subject containing an ample range for the most vigorous exercise of all the powers of their minds, and one into which they forever desire to look, and the contemplation of which serves only to heighten their admiration. Need we then say, that in this subject man may find wisdom sufficient to employ an eternity in contemplating.

If, then, in the doctrine of Christ crucified there is everything necessary for the salvation of every individual of mankind, what an appalling view does this fact present of the guilt of those who either neglect or stubbornly refuse to comply with the requirements of the economy of redemption; and how fearfully will the punishment of such be enhanced when God shall render to each his proper portion of indignation and wrath.

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SERMON V.

HOW TO OBTAIN ETERNAL LIFE.

LAY HOLD ON ETERNAL LIFE.

1 TIMOTHY, vi. 12.

It is one of the sad consequences of the fall, that while our evils are the spontaneous production of the soil upon which we tread, the good we desire to possess is foreign to the region we inhabit, and if obtained, must be sought for from some source external to the place of our abode. Our sorrows crowd upon us in rapid and unbroken succession, but our joys follow each other at long and irregular intervals. Our calamities cannot be always avoided, even by the most prudent foresight, or by the strongest barriers we may endeavour to raise for our defence; while on the contrary, our pleasures are continually eluding our pursuit, nor can they be induced to be our constant companions by the most pressing solicitations. Adversity is a plant which abounds in every region of our earth: whose leaf never withers and whose fruit never fails; but prosperity is the rare production of another clime, which speedily droops beneath the rays of the ascending sun.

The disobedience of man has transformed the bloom of Eden into the barrenness of a desert waste, and produced the most

mournful and unhappy reverses in his condition. In his state of innocence, he was heir to happiness; but under the reign of sin, he is born to sorrow as his entailed inheritance. Then he enjoyed the full flow and vigor of spiritual life; disease and death had no affinity for his nature. But now the chill of spiritual death has reached his very vitals, and weakness, disease, and dissolution, are his inseparable companions; and that life to which he was created heir, is obtained only by his most vigorous and persevering exertions. The idea suggested by our text is that of a person pursuing an object with the utmost eagerness, which is perpetually endeavouring to avoid his grasp and to elude his pursuit. In order to obtain it, he is required to cast off every incumbrance, run with all possible speed, and with an extended arm to seize it with a most vigorous grasp, and to continue his hold until the object of his pursuit is finally secured. Nor is this by any means an improper emblem by which to represent the resolute determination, the unwearied diligence, and activity necessary for the christian to maintain, in order to secure the enjoyment of his salvation on earth, and the possession of his final rest in heaven.

Following out the metaphor contained in the text, let us pursue our meditations upon this subject by considering,—

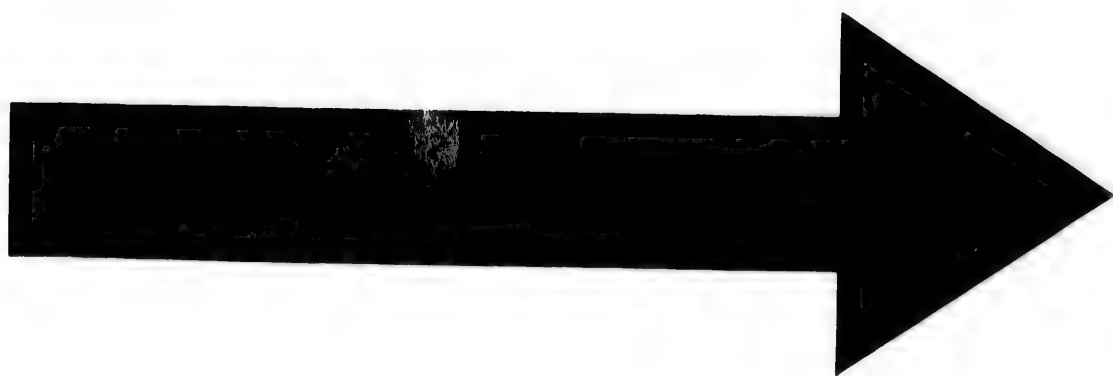
I. The object here spoken of: Eternal life.

II. The manner in which we are to obtain it, and secure its final and everlasting possession.

I. The object on which we are to lay hold is eternal life. Life, in its simplest sense, is used to signify the connexion of the immaterial spirit with the body, of which it is the animating principle. It may, however, be defined as that consciousness of our existence which we continually possess, and which renders us susceptible of the emotions of pleasure or of pain.

It is not one of the accidental properties of our existence, which may be dispensed without any material consequence resulting from its absence. It is that very existence itself: the consciousness that we are; that we enjoy pleasure, or that we suffer pain.

Life, in its simple sense, and unconnected with any one of the various and important subjects which its existence necessarily embraces, is an object of all hearts the most ardently and unceasingly desired, and one upon which we fix the highest value. Satan, although the father of lies, told the truth once at least when he said,—“Yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.” Job ii. 4. Let his possessions be as extensive as they may, life is the last thing he will consent to relinquish. The simple idea of life, then, is, in our estimation, of the very highest importance, and to retain it we would be willing to lose everything else. But the term by which the life here spoken of is qualified, increases its value to an inconceivable extent. It is eternal life; the unending perpetuity of that existence we so highly prize, and the loss of which we so much dread. The idea of annihilation is perhaps the most abhorrent and repulsive to our nature of which we can possibly form any conception; nor can we consent to entertain it seriously even when groaning under the heaviest burden of nature's woes. Go to the most miserable of human sufferers, to prisoners in the most loathsome dungeons, or to the slaves, lacerated by the stripes of a cruel and imperious master, and offer them, as the only alternative, the perpetuation of their miseries, or the termination of their existence, and they would consent to endure afflictions two-fold more severe, rather than purchase relief at so great a cost. And were you to descend into the prison-house of the lost, you might hear the rich man asking for the mitigation of his pains, but not for the termination of his existence.



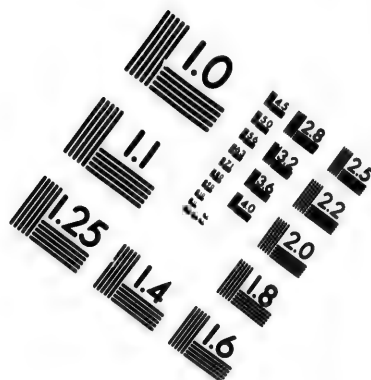
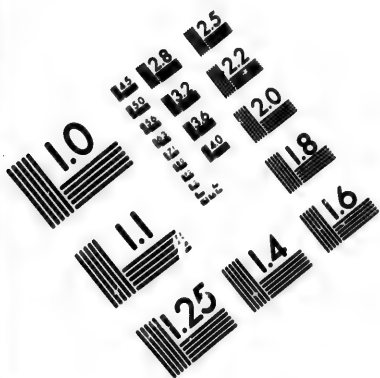
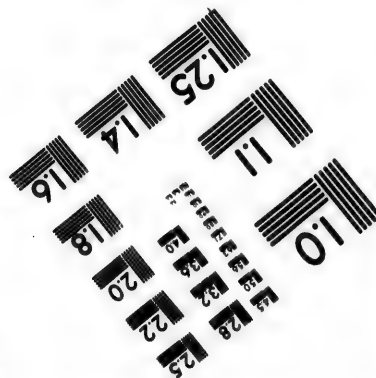
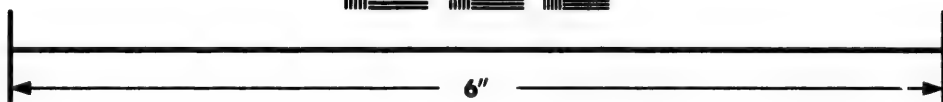
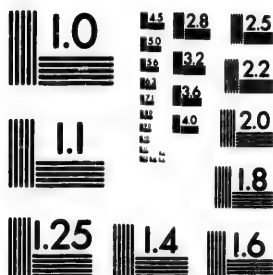


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We sometimes hear, it is true, of persons wishing for death to relieve their sufferings, but they wish for death, not as an event that puts a final period to their being, but under the supposition that it will end their sufferings, and introduce them into a new and more desirable mode of life.

If life, then, in itself, be so desirable to man, under whatever circumstances its existence may be prolonged, the infinity of its duration stamps it with a value as inconceivably great as the unlimited bounds of space over which it is destined to extend. But if eternal life, even when considered apart from the truths of revelation, or as the mere continuance of vital being, be an object more desirable and valuable to us than all the treasures of creation, how inconceivably is its value increased when we contemplate it by the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and in connexion with those glorious realities with which it will be associated, both in its incipient stages in time, and in the full strength and vigor of its maturity in the mansions prepared for the future residence of the soul in heaven.

In the possession of this eternal life is implied all those spiritual pleasures which the soul of man can possibly desire, and without which the aspirations of the immortal spirit can never be satisfied. It implies the possession and the enjoyment of God himself, and all the unspeakable soul-satisfying delights which flow from the assurance of his favour, the protection of his power amidst the dangers that beset our path, the consolations of his Spirit under all the ills and afflictions of life, and the glorious and animating prospect of finally receiving for his everlasting inheritance the crown of life, and in the presence of his Redeemer and God to enjoy the fullness of eternal pleasures. If that object is valuable to man, and that one only really so which raises him to the elevated

position in the scale of intellectual and moral existence he was created to occupy, eternal life is that object. It takes him from the horrible pit and miry clay, and sets his feet upon a rock; it finds him dead and degraded by sin, it raises him to spiritual life, and to the possession of moral excellence; it finds him laden with guilt, and it frees him from condemnation; it appoints unto him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness; elevates and purifies the affections of his soul, and prepares him to associate with a higher order of created intelligences, and in the kingdom of his God to spend an eternity of joy in adoring the riches of that grace which has conducted him through all the meanderings of his progress from earth, to his high and glorious abode in the heavens.

What the real value of this object is, we cannot properly compute with our present limited powers of conception. We may form some estimate of its worth by considering the blessedness of its effects, even in the present life, upon those who secure its possession, but what will be the vast amount of that exceeding great and eternal weight of glory to which they will be advanced in their future home, it will require the enlarged conceptions of an angelic intellect, the arithmetic of heaven, and the unending years of eternity to calculate. The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians describes it as embracing all things: "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas," &c. 1 Cor. iii. 21, 23.

What more then can we desire? If in laying hold of eternal life, we seize, as it were, by the same grasp, every thing, even God himself, and all beneath his throne, we have all that the vast dominions of creation contain, and in possession of this for our inheritance, we have an exhaustless provision to satisfy all our desires. We can wish for nothing more,

because the whole treasures of earth and heaven are ours, and beyond these our desires cannot possibly extend. Here, then, is the object set before us, eternal life, an object most desirable, and stamped with the highest and most lasting value.

II. We proceed to notice the manner in which we are to obtain it: lay hold on eternal life.

The form of speech here employed conveys the impression to our minds that we are to obtain eternal life by a violent seizure, or at least by a most vigorous exertion of our strength, and also that the object of our pursuit will elude our grasp even after we have obtained it, unless we continue to maintain our hold with unwearied diligence, until the possession of our treasure is finally and forever secured. The proper signification of the original term here rendered, "*lay hold on*," will be best understood by supposing, for example, that there is a valuable article the subject of fierce dispute between two contending parties. The person to whom it properly belongs seizes it with a firm and determined grasp, watches every movement, and foils every attempt of his antagonist, and continues to guard his treasure with the utmost vigilance and persevering courage, until he conveys it away to a place of security. Now we have here a very appropriate representation of the earnestness, and unwearied diligence which the Christian must employ to insure his ultimate success.

A treasure of unspeakable value is offered to us as our purchased right through Jesus Christ. There are malignant foes who will contest our claim, and employ every stratagem to prevent us from obtaining its possession, or to wrest it from us after it has been gained. In order to be successful we are required to give all diligence, to summon to our aid all the powers of our souls and bodies, and faithfully to employ every means, and every opportunity afforded us. Nothing less than

this will insure success. As the object for which we are to seek is infinitely great in its value and importance, it cannot be obtained without labour in some degree proportioned to its value. Even a heathen writer understood this law in the economy of human affairs when he wrote the sentiment,—

"Nil sine magno vita labore dedit mortalibus."—HORACE.

And this is most emphatically true when applied to this subject. Heaven bestows eternal life on those only who consider it worth a cordial reception when offered for their acceptance; but who are willing to obtain it as the achievement of a heroic contest.

We have already remarked that the idea suggested by the text is that of pursuing an object which is continually endeavouring to elude his grasp. This however is not strictly true in respect to the one here mentioned. The very reverse of this is the case. Eternal life is offered for our acceptance, brought to our very door, and is urged upon us by the most pressing and persuasive solicitations. Thus the author of the Proverbs says, "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors: Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart." Prov. viii. 1-5. The difficulty we experience in the contest for eternal life does not lie in the efforts of the object to elude our pursuit, but in our own indisposition to seek its possession. We lay hold of it with, at the best, but a palsied hand and feeble grasp, and are every moment ready to quit our hold. Hence the necessity of the injunction, "*lay hold*" upon it. Seize it with a firm, and hold it with a

steady and determined grasp, lest at any time you let it slip and lose it forever.

What, then, is implied in laying hold on eternal life?

1. Be sure to obtain *it*, and not something else. Do not mistake your object.

2. Having *obtained*, be careful to *retain* it, by watching and prayer, by the proper use of every means, and by making the best of every opportunity. Take for the purpose of instruction the example of a person whose heart is set upon obtaining riches. He leaves no means untried, watches every opportunity, and like the fabled philosopher's stone, turns every thing he touches into gold. Now if all this must be done to obtain the perishing riches of earth, shall we suppose that the incorruptible treasures of eternal life can be secured by the use of any less vigorous means? The highest bidder always secures the prize, and those only will be sure of heaven who are resolved to obtain it at any price.

SERMON VI.

THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE.

JESUS SAITH UNTO THEM, DID YE NEVER READ IN THE SCRIPTURES, THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THE SAME IS BECOME THE HEAD OF THE CORNER: THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELLOUS IN OUR EYES?

MATT. xxi. 42.

These words are a quotation from the 118th Psalm, and the manner in which they are introduced, shows them to be a prophecy referring to the Messiah as the great Head of his spiritual temple, the Church. They are employed by the Saviour in this place, as an appropriate description of the manner in which he would be treated by his own nation, and particularly by the chief priests and elders of the people. They also may be viewed as a prediction of the ultimate triumph of the Redeemer over all the opposition of his enemies, and the universal spread of his spiritual dominion.

There was a story current among the Jews to which they applied this passage in the Psalms, viz. : That during the erection of the second temple, a stone lay on the ground which was repeatedly tried for different places in the building, but was as often rejected, until at last it was found to be the one required

for the completion of the edifice. But the Saviour taught them that its true application was to a far more important event. The *stone* was himself: the Rock on which the great spiritual temple should be erected. The *builders* were the chief priests and elders, who rejected him and refused to own him as the Messiah. But, notwithstanding all their malice and infidelity, he must become the head of the corner; exalted to be the head of all principalities and powers, and of his church in particular; uniting both Jews and Gentiles in one glorious body. "And this is the Lord's doing," who permitted and overruled their hostility for the ultimate advancement of his cause. "And it is marvellous in our eyes," the obduracy of the Jews, the rejection of the Messiah, and his exaltation; all are marvellously ordered so as to advance the glory of the divine Redeemer, to pour confusion on his enemies, and to secure the final success of his cause.

The first idea suggested by these words in their application to the divine Redeemer is, that the enemies of Christ were permitted by the Lord to manifest their opposition and hatred to his cause. In reading the history of Christ, we are sometimes led to wonder at the unyielding hostility of the Jewish people to Christ, and to enquire, "Why were they permitted to join in unholy league to counteract the design of his advent? to employ their influence in opposing the erection of his spiritual temple, the church?" The text answers the inquiry: "It was the Lord's doing." He suffered them to succeed, as they supposed, for a time; until they had proceeded so far as to kill the Prince of life, and to secure, in their imagination at least, the entire destruction of his cause. The Saviour might at the first have clothed himself in all the terrible majesty of his omnipotence, and crushed all opposition by one sudden sweep of his indignation, had he in his wisdom

been so disposed. But the apparent momentary triumph of his enemies and his humiliating defeat, but served to heighten the glory of his subsequent achievements. When rising from the obscurity and confinement of the tomb, he turned the victorious shouts of his supposed conquerors into the silence of an inglorious defeat; and from that moment he commenced that series of splendid triumphs, by an agency so apparently weak and inefficient, as to prove most conclusively that the preaching of the cross was nothing less than the manifestation of the workings of the arm of Omnipotence.

That the supernatural in religion has not ceased nor been rendered unnecessary, either by the lapse of time, or the advantages which civilization and science confer upon mankind, is a fact which needs no laboured argument to prove. We are, however, fully aware of the tendency of the human mind to attribute to natural causes any effect of frequent occurrence; and this is too often unhappily the case, even in regard to that all-important work, the salvation of the fallen soul. How many there are, who, in practice at least, if not in theory, regard it as the ordinary or natural result of the mere outward observance of certain forms and ceremonies; as a kind of moral machinery adapted to our fallen condition; and designed, as their natural tendency and ultimate effect, to raise the fallen soul from its moral degradation, and fit it for a higher and purer state of existence in the heavenly world. But though the infidel may sneer; the moralist reason; and the dead formalist cry "presumption! enthusiasm!! blasphemy!!!" we will point to the sinner whenever we see one converted from the error of his ways, and fearless of successful contradiction, we declare,—"This is the Lord's doing,"—the real work of an omnipotent agency. Nor is it so in that lower or secondary sense, in which we regard the effects produced by the

operations of the laws of the material world, as the work of the Lord, but in a particular sense, as evidently displaying the immediate presence and workings of his almighty Spirit. To what else can we possibly ascribe a work so grand in its nature, and so glorious in its results, as to be an object of the most intense interest and unspeakable delight even to the angelic hosts? Look at the sinner in his fallen state, and then behold him in his happy contrast when made the subject of the saving grace of the Gospel. Are natural causes; the light of nature; the ethics of morality; or the external ceremonies of religion; are any or all of these combined, sufficient to account for these truly wonderful or marvellous effects? Think for a moment of the darkness and depravity of the fallen spirit ignorant of God, in its most emphatic sense; ignorant of himself, neither knowing nor caring for the purpose for which he was created; possessing in his heart the very root and principle of every evil; an inveterate and uncompromising hatred of all that is holy and good; urged onward to the commission of all the works of darkness, as if by a perpetual and irresistible impulse; and, as utterly regardless of the consequences of his sins, he goes on "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath," and working out his own damnation with greediness.

But behold this same ignorant, degraded, wicked, and maniac-like being under another aspect; bearing an entirely different character; restored to the possession of a degree of moral excellence and spiritual purity which render him the perfect contrast of his former self, and stamp him again with the image of God. Whence, we ask, is this wonderful change? What has quickened this mass of moral death into spiritual life? What light is this which has illumined the dungeon of the sinner's soul? What potent arm has broken the chains of his spiritual bondage? What power has harmonized with his

warring passions, and brought peace out of confusion, and order out of that fearful chaos? Above all, whence have been derived those holy desires and ardent aspirations after the joys of salvation and the bliss of heaven? Is carnal nature capable of working out such results? or mere outward ceremonies a sufficient cause to account for such truly wonderful effects? We answer, No. It is the work of the Lord; and that, too, in a sense as pre-eminent as the calling out of nature's chaos the order and beauty of this terrestrial sphere. Whence, but from God himself, is life to re-animate our spiritual death; light to illumine the rayless gloom of our moral night; or pure and holy affections to be planted in hearts by nature the undisturbed abode of every vicious propensity? Nor is it less eminently the work of God, the preservation of the regenerated soul in the possession and constant exercise of its spiritual and holy affections, than it was to implant them at the commencement of a spiritual life. The upward progress of the soul in its transition from darkness to light,—or, more comprehensively, from earth to heaven, at any and every moment, is to be ascribed to the effectual workings of the Omnipotent Spirit. "The just shall live by his faith," says the prophet, Hab. ii. 4; and the apostle Peter, I. Peter, i. 5, in language of similar import, says,—“Who are kept by the power of God through faith.” Consider for a moment the nature of the effect, viz.: a life of active prayer,—and then to what cause shall it be attributed but to the active and ever-living energy of the Holy Spirit.

There is a fallen nature always susceptible of the allurements of sensible objects, and ever prone to listen, at least, to the enticements of sinful pleasures. Where is the security of the Christian in the day of trial; whether of prosperity or

adversity ; whether he is presented with the kingdoms of this world and their glory ; or, under the heaviest pressure of want, he is assailed with suggestions of distrust. For such seasons of trial and conflict where is his high refuge, or the source from which the help is obtained, which not only saves him from sinking under the burden of his conflicts and sorrows, but even enables him triumphantly to exclaim,—“ Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors !” “ This is indeed the Lord’s doing.” And such is the nature of the conflict which the christian is required to maintain against the combined powers of earth and hell, that were he left for one moment to contend by his own unaided strength, he would fall beneath their superior force. “ Without me,” says the Saviour, “ ye can do nothing.” John xv. 5. The secret of his strength is most beautifully portrayed by the apostle in his description of the spiritual warfare, and the invincible armour with which every christian soldier is furnished : “ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness ; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and

watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Eph. vi. 10-18.

But, in considering further this part of the subject, we may notice a few of the more remarkable manifestations of Divine power in raising up and enduing, with extraordinary qualifications, the instruments necessary to carry forward to its final accomplishment the great and glorious temple, his building. If it be true that every lively stone in this spiritual edifice is prepared and placed there by the Lord himself, this truth—the divinity of this work—shines forth in a more conspicuous manner in the case of those who occupy a distinguished place, and perform a more important and illustrious part, in this glorious living temple. What a host of worthies, too, has almost every age of the church of God possessed; persons who, in point of true heroism and unsullied magnanimity, and all the elements of real glory, have as far excelled the brightest specimens that the world has produced, as the noon-tide splendour of the unclouded sun exceeds the feeblest twinkling of the most distant star. Time would fail me to tell of all the heroic exploits of Gideon, of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David, also, and of Samuel, and of the prophets; "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." Heb. 11: 32-35. The world boasts of its heroes, and glories in the conquests it has achieved. But there are no heroes, but Christian heroes; nor any conquests but those which Christianity has achieved over the hostility of the carnal mind,

The history of Christianity presents us with a host of most illustrious characters, adorned with virtues of a supernatural origin, and exhibiting in the highest degree all the elements of an unearthly heroism. If the voluntary sacrifice of worldly good, the patient endurance of the severest afflictions, and an uncompromising faithfulness in the performance of duty in face of the greatest dangers, and in view of death, are traits of character which distinguish the true hero, how many of this description has Christianity produced? Amongst its early witnesses and martyrs, there is one the study of whose character is invested with the highest interest and advantage. Where in the annals of human history can his equal be found? I mean the apostle Paul. In his plans of usefulness, his conceptions were as comprehensive as the spirit of the glorious system by which he was inspired. In the execution of his god-like designs, neither labours wearied nor difficulties discouraged him; his courage never failed him; and even in view of the greatest dangers he was as unmoved by fear, and as intent upon the accomplishment of his work as when no obstacle appeared to oppose his progress. He was the same man in this respect, whether free or in bonds; amongst his most faithful friends, or in the midst of an infuriated rabble; whether at the commencement of his apostolic course, or when every day expecting to seal it with his blood. In the full expectation of being called to endure the severest trial of his courage, he could say without any misgivings: "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the

Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." Acts xx. 22-24. Who but God himself could inspire the human heart with such sentiments, and sustain the weakness of fallen nature with the strength and courage sufficient for the performance of the arduous and self-denying labours of a herald of the Gospel, and that, too, in view of the certainty of the obloquy, and contempt, and scandal of the cross.

Again, if we consider some of the more remarkable circumstances connected with the history of the Church of God even in these our latter days, we behold rising up before us in majestic grandeur some of the most noble specimens of Christian character, which exhibit in the most impressive manner the divinity of the cause by which they have been produced.

The Church, the work of God himself, his great Spiritual Temple, is a combination, not of the worldly and selfish to advance their own peculiar interests, not of the powerful and wealthy to tyrannize over the poor and helpless, but an association of the great and the good, the aged pastor, the ardent Missionary, and the young disciple; an association employing their resources and engaged in promoting the most god-like and noble enterprise. Amongst the number of this unearthly confederation there are some whose character shines with distinguished lustre, reflecting most brilliantly the light of the "Sun of Righteousness." Here female piety has recognized and displayed anew the glory which it won when it wept at the cross, and was early at the sepulchre. Here offerings more costly than those of the "sweet spices" of the sepulchre have been presented by the Christian Marys of modern times. Here many a mother in the obscurity of her humble abode, has, from the constraining influence of the love of Christ, like the mother of Mills, dedicated her offspring

to a post of distant labour. What Spartan mother of old, when buckling on the armour of her son, and bidding him as she gave him his shield, "either to bring it back, or to be brought back upon it," can compare with the widowed mother of Lyman, when receiving the intelligence that her son had been murdered by the cannibals, Battus replied, "I bless God who gave me such a son to go to the heathen, and I never felt so strongly as I do at this moment the desire that some other of my sons may become Missionaries also, and may go and preach the Gospel of Salvation to those savage men who have drunk the blood of my son." What ancient Hebrew women receiving their dead raised to life again surpassed the self-denying faith of the widowed mother, who could say of a son, to whom herself and her seven children were beginning to look for support, "Let him go; God will provide for me and my babes. And who am I that I should be thus honoured to have a son a Missionary to the heathen?" and who when that son had laboured successfully, and had fallen in India, could say of a second son who aspired to follow in the foot-steps of his brother, "Let William follow Joseph, though it be to India, and to an early grave." Here, too, may be seen the highly accomplished and intellectual female, meekly, yet firmly and cheerfully, devoting herself to a distant and arduous career, eclipsing the martial hero in the stern defiance of dangers, and surpassing the martyr in the endurance of the fiery trials. If self-devotion deserve our applause, who, amongst others, can present a stronger claim than Harriet Newell? If the heroic endurance of suffering is worthy to be embalmed in the memory, who deserves a brighter memorial than Ann Hazeltine Judson?

II. But our attention is directed by the text, not merely to the divinity of the work here spoken of, but also and more

particularly to its eminently miraculous character: "It is marvellous in our eyes." The marvellous character of the work consists, not merely in carrying it forward against all the actively interposing obstacles, but in even causing the very opposition itself to aid in the promotion of its final accomplishment. "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner." The very act of the builders in rejecting this stone was so overruled by the Great Architect of this Spiritual Temple, as to place this stone in the very position for which it was designed, at "the head of the corner,"—there to beautify, uphold, and perfect the whole edifice. This is marvellous in our eyes, exhibiting in the clearest light the inconceivable power and wisdom of Jehovah, in the abundant resources he possesses for the accomplishment of his glorious designs, when he can command even the malignant opposition of his foes to aid in the more speedy accomplishment of the purposes of his redeeming plans.

The enemies of God have always ultimately promoted the cause which they wished to destroy. Nor do we here lack for facts to prove the truth of this assertion. Solomon was seven years building the temple while all was peace, and when tributary nations around brought him abundant materials for the edifice; but Ezra, with the trowel in one hand, and the sword in the other, could build the second temple in four. It is said of the children of Israel, while groaning under the oppressive servitude of Egypt's cruel task-masters, that the more they afflicted them "the more they multiplied and grew." Ex. i. 12. Nor can we pass over another very familiar fact in illustration of this subject. What, I inquire, has been the ultimate effects of the efforts of the enemies of the Bible to sap and destroy the foundations of its claims to a celestial origin? In the fury of their zeal they have compassed sea and land, ransacked the

bowels of the earth, tortured the elements of nature, and called the distant stars to speak and bear witness that the word of truth is a fable. Shall we say that they have failed of receiving even their own preconceived response to their inquiries? Nay: they have more than failed; every omen has been inauspicious; every response of their chosen oracles has been unequivocally unfavourable, and every witness they have examined has testified against them. Nor is this all. Master minds of almost every age, aroused by the opposition of the enemies of inspiration, have arisen in their giant strength and demolished every castle of the foe, and upon these very ruins they have erected monuments high as the heavens, imperishable as eternity, and inscribed with characters of living light, of a more significant and conclusive import to the infidel than those of the supernatural hand upon the wall to Babylon's guilty and terrified king. And but for the efforts of skeptics to overthrow the truth of God, we might never have possessed those incontrovertible arguments which set forth so clearly the immovable security of the foundation and guide of our faith. We talk much in the present day of the skill of man in training the fierce lightning to his service, bidding it speed its rapid course to bear to distant friends the dictates of his will; but how much more amazing is Jehovah's skill, who causes the very wrath of man that would suppress even the whisperings of Divine compassion to a fallen world, to proclaim more distinctly the messages of heavenly mercy. This is, indeed, "marvellous in our eyes," and yet it is no mystery, for so it is.

But again, we consider a subject in more immediate connexion with the words of the text, though perhaps not more clearly illustrative of its general meaning. We refer to the personal history of the Saviour during the brief period of his public ministry. There is one fact connected with this history which

cannot but fix the attention of the most careless reader : it is, that the envious, unreasonable, and captious opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees and Chief Priests, so far from opposing any effectual resistance to the work in which he was engaged, that very opposition, unyielding and malignant as was its character, was so overruled by the wisdom of God as to contribute an involuntary influence in promoting the object it was seeking to destroy. A greater delusion can scarcely be imagined than that which seemed to prevail over the minds of the members of that council, which said, "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him : and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." John xi. 48.

Why, it was this very fact, that they would *not* "let him alone," that was making him an object of more anxious curiosity and of greater interest; and while they were endeavouring to lift him up for public contempt, his real character thus becoming more conspicuous, he was drawing all men unto himself; every attempt of his enemies to evade the force of his miracles, only rendered the divinity of their author more apparent; every captious question proposed, and every crafty controversy commenced, ended in the double mortification of confusion of face, and of hearing the thundering responses of the delighted multitudes, "Never man spake like this man." And after these enemies had faithfully plied every art that a malicious ingenuity could devise, and envy itself had grown weary of its object, hope, with its dying groans, extorted the mournful tale of their success : "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him," John xii. 19.

But consider further the nature of the scenes presented to our view in immediate connexion with that most important of events, the closing period of his life. Were wonders high on

wonders higher rise. Who but He who is great in power and wonderful in working, *could* have so controlled the apparently successful opposition of the foes of the Redeemer, as to cause it to defeat its own designs, and to heighten the glory of his final triumph. Yet so it was. They were suffered to proceed so far as to procure his condemnation and death, and to sound the first notes of song in honour of what they exultingly imagined their glorious achievement. Little, indeed, did they think what would be the real result of their boasted triumph. Yet the very event which raised their brightest anticipations, overwhelmed them with all the horrors of interminable despair : and that mournful scene, which the disciples of the Saviour regarded as the grave of their hopes, was to them the opening dawn of an eternal day of promise. The hour of his apparent defeat was the day of his most signal and glorious triumph. It was when he fell that he rose ; and when he died, that he destroyed "him that had the power of death." How marvellous, indeed, is the truth, that at the very moment when the Redeemer was taken captive by the tyrant of the grave, even then he broke his cruel power. Loosing the conqueror's chains, he marched in triumph through his dark and hostile dominions, and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made an open display of the spoils of his splendid victory, and pointing to the proud destroyer, as he lay prostrate, and quivering on his own chosen field of battle, he bids his once helpless captives—

"Now ask the monster, Where's thy sting?
And, Where's thy victory, boasting grave?"

The serpent bruised the heel of the woman's conquering seed; but it was then that he set his foot upon the head of his reptile foe, and crushed it beneath his almighty weight.

Contemplating the transcendently glorious results of this wonderful transaction, when He, by the apparently sad catas-

trophe of his death, destroyed him that had the power of death, became the Author of eternal life to a world of ruined sinners, we may join in the song of triumph—

“Break off your tears, ye saints, and tell
How high your great Deliverer reigns;
Sing how he spoil'd the hosts of hell,
And led the monster, death, in chains.”

Who is the conqueror now? They who triumphed, or he who was defeated?—they who lived, or he who died?

Where was the victory? Was it when the monarch of the grave claimed the body of the Saviour, as the subject of his universal dominion? or when

“The powers of hell are captive led,
Dragg'd to the portals of the sky?”

But again. How marvellous the means that Jehovah employed in connexion with this event to declare his boundless love! “Go to Calvary! What wonderful scenes we there behold! The heavens grow black—the sun disappears—the earth trembles—rocks cleave asunder—the vail of the magnificent temple was rent in twain, as if by a sacrilegious though invisible hand—the bursting graves release the re-animated bodies of the saints! What truth do these prodigies attest?—God is love! But can it be? love selecting for its heralds, the eclipse, the fearful darkness, and the terrific earthquake? Yes; amidst these awful movements of nature, in her disturbed condition, we hear the distinct and emphatic announcement, ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,’ and his death, which consummates the scheme of mercy, is the event which these wonders proclaim. While the ocean of Divine love was thus stirred up from its lowest depths, God would have all nature feel these emotions too.”

We pass on to notice the marvellous nature of some of the glorious results of the scheme of redeeming mercy. Here we

must select a few from amongst an innumerable multitude. We need not here dwell at length upon the oft-repeated but delightful fact, that the wrath of the enemies of the Christian Church has often contributed to its increase and stability. The very cross itself has proved an engine to aid in the erection of this spiritual house. The flames which have been kindled to consume, have lighted its apartments, and displayed anew their royal magnificence. The blood of the Martyrs has cemented the walls of the edifice and contributed to its strength and beauty. The nature of the spiritual conquests which Christianity has achieved is worthy of our attention, as marking distinctly the marvellous character of this work. Compare them with those of the most illustrious of martial heroes, and how amazing the difference! Take the most favourable example, the history of Alexander, the rapidity of whose exploits is represented in the visions of Daniel by the he-goat, which seemed not to touch the earth. There are marvels in this history it is true; but there is one which may challenge all the others; and that is, that he accomplished so little, while he seemed to sway a universal sceptre.

The rapidity of his flight from country to country, and the apparent readiness of tribes, nations and kingdoms, awed by the terror of his name, to submit to his authority, was excelled only by the promptness with which they rebelled against him. Scarcely had the last notes of the songs which celebrated his victories died away on his ears, than he heard the news of a revolt. When the conqueror fell a victim to himself, what were the fruits of his conquests? Anarchy and confusion reigned as his successor. He died without an heir or a confident.

But see again, that most abject among the train of miserable captives, dragged at the triumphant chariot of the lordly con-

queror. Is he subdued? Nay, though bound, he is free; there is a soul in that lettered body that disdains and refuses to yield to any earthly power. He only waits the favourable moment to break the chains from his hands, and to plunge the deadly dagger into the proud heart of the hated captor, and declare himself free.

Let us contemplate now one of the conquests of the cross. Here all is marvellous reality and perfection. Take, in the absence of a more striking example, the case of Saul of Tarsus, and a better cannot be desired. You know his former character. Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, he was on his way to Damascus; but behold him suddenly arrested by an invisible and irresistible power, and hear him inquiring, in terms of unqualified submission, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" He goes on to his place of destination, but how changed? Quiet as a lamb, the fierce persecutor is now led by those who a few moments before were following at his bidding to do his deeds of blood. He goes to Damascus a subdued captive of the Prince of Peace; he seeks instruction from the disciples of the Saviour; obtains his animating favour, and immediately preaches him in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God, and Lord of all. How wonderful the transformation here effected. The conquest is not only complete, but the spoils of the victory are also secured, and the captive is bound in strongest allegiance to the conqueror's sacred person and throne, and the very weapon by which the conquest has been gained, is now the subject of his highest glory and joy: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal. vi. 14. But more than all this, he not only loves the Conqueror's name, and glories in the weapons by which he achieves his conquests,

but with the burning ardour of a self-consuming zeal, he aspires to the honour of bearing to every land the ensigns of his kingdom, and the blessings of his glorious reign ; counting not even his life dear unto himself, so that he might declare to all the excellency of that knowledge of Him, for whom he counted the loss of all things an unspeakable and eternal gain.

Compare with this single one all the conquests of the warrior with garments rolled in blood, and how contemptible do they all appear. In their triumphant march, treason, misery, and ruin are the grim attendants of their train ; but wherever he pursues his victorious way, "the wilderness and the solitary places are glad, and the deserts rejoice and blossom as the rose."

" Blessings abound where'er he reigns,
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains ;
In him the tribes of Adam boast,
More blessings than their father lost."

We proceed to notice another subject which displays no less significantly the marvellous character of this glorious work. Death, in his character as king of terrors, is represented as the last and most formidable foe of fallen man. And well does it deserve this title when we consider how terrible has been the contest in which he has triumphed over some of the tallest of the giant sons of earth ; and then when we turn and contemplate the delightful contrast where the weakness of the weakest has fearlessly contended with the tyrant, and gained the final victory.

Let us go and for a moment behold the scene that was acted when Voltaire, that hero of modern infidels, met in encounter with the last enemy of man. He boasted of what would be his mighty achievement. Twelve men had been employed to establish Christianity, but he alone would have the honour of composing the requiem of its funeral pyre. Alas ! he found,

that while he had toiled in vain to "crush the wretch," as he impiously called the Saviour, the king of terrors had assumed a more terrific aspect, and when they met for the concluding contest, how terrible indeed was the scene. So unutterably awful was the death of Voltaire, that the person who attended him during his last illness, solemnly declared that no earthly consideration would induce her to witness and endure the horrors of another such a scene. Nor do we suppose it possible that there is one to be found amongst the brethren of his impious creed that would dare utter the wish, "Let me die the death of Voltaire, and let my last end be like his." It is related of Francis Newport, that when his dissolution approached, recovering a little breath, with a groan so dreadful and loud as if it had not been human, he cried out, "Oh! the insufferable pangs of hell and damnation," and died with this expression—death settling his face in such a form as if the lifeless body were sensible of the torments of the soul. Examine the pleasing contrast, and how marvellous will it appear. How different Paul and Peter and the beloved disciple died; and how different some of the ancient martyrs triumphed over their final foe.

"I do not know how it is," said a certain physician, "that my Methodist patients seem to feel it such an easy thing to die." You do not know? For once then the mystery shall be revealed. Whether Methodists, or of any other name, if the love of Christ is in their hearts, they will sing amidst the pains of dissolving nature—

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are;
While on his breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there."

This is marvellous in our eyes, indeed. The Christian conquers when he dies; the tyrant foe comes, and with his

giant grasp breaks open the prison house, and the liberated captive wings its upward flight to a throne above. "This is the Lord's doing," and we will cease to wonder, for it is like himself, and like his work.

Nor should we forget in considering this subject, the marvellous truth that the saints in glory will enjoy a higher state of felicity than if they had never sinned. Sin is, indeed, an awful evil ; but in respect to those who accept its remedy, it will not only entail no sad effects, but the very evils from which they have been saved will enhance their eternal bliss. Had man never sinned, he would doubtlessly have stood in the relation of a servant, or a subject of the heavenly King ; but now under the reign of grace, being mystically united to Christ, he bears the more endearing epithet of son, and will finally be promoted to royal honours. "He (Jesus Christ) has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." Rev. i. 6. Had sin never inflicted its blighting curse on earth, the happiness of man would have been liable to no interruptions, and his removal from earth to heaven, if that event had taken place, would probably have increased his felicity, but we have no means of ascertaining the exact proportion. But now trace the redeemed sinner through this scene of mortality and woe, till you behold him before the throne of God and the Lamb ; and while we are conscious that he enjoys all the sources of bliss which he would have enjoyed had he entered heaven from a state of innocence, you will perceive that his most exalted felicity arises from his redemption ; and we have reason to believe that the happiness of the glorified saints will be even superior to that of angels. For while saints may join with angels in their highest ascriptions of praise, there is a chorus in the songs of the redeemed which angels cannot sing.

The saints will tune their golden harps to higher and richer

strains than angel harps can sound, and with stronger emotions of gratitude and love will sing in the sweetest melodies of heaven, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." Rev. i. 6. "How marvellous in our eyes" this work of God, that our very degradation and misery should be made the occasion of our promotion to higher honours and more richer joys. We argue here, that in the operations of the material world, the effect cannot destroy the cause; but in Heaven's scheme of mercy there is a wonderful reverse. Sin, the cause of all our sorrows and of death, has not only been destroyed, but by the very dark and dreary passage it has prepared for our entrance to our final home, we are introduced to more splendid mansions, to happier society, and to richer rewards.

There is still another marvel to tell. Hark! what the beloved disciple said, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven." Rev. xii. 1. But, my brethren, if we get within that place, of whose glory John was permitted to have only a distant view, we shall behold greater wonders than John had then ever seen. Among the ten thousand wonders that will there greet our ravished eyes, ourselves will be the greatest of them all. When we look down and fathom the horrible pit out of which we have been raised, and see the thrones of glory on which we are seated, and the splendour of our shining crowns, and feeling the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, look upwards still and view the Lamb in his own light, with highest strains we shall sing—

"Amazing love! how can it be,
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me!"

When we look around us, and see there our friends and

companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus, the old veterans of the cross, our fathers and mothers, our brethren and sisters, our children, and the young disciples of the Saviour; and when we take a deeper glance into the bottomless pit, and look higher and yet higher still to joys above, we shall wonder on and inquire—

“How can it be, thou heavenly King,
That thou shouldst us to glory bring?”
Make slaves the partners of thy throne,
Decked with a never-fading crown!”

Well then may it be said of this work, it is “marvellous in our eyes;” and the more we view it, the more marvellous it appears.

We have here the assurance that this temple shall be completed. God has promised, and what more can we ask? He has never failed in anything he has undertaken. The commotions of nations will not shake its foundations. We need have no fears. It must rise unless the Builder dies or abandons his work.

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SERMON VII.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

AND IN THE DAYS OF THESE KINGS SHALL THE GOD OF HEAVEN SET UP A KINGDOM, WHICH SHALL NEVER BE DESTROYED : AND THE KINGDOM SHALL NOT BE LEFT TO OTHER PEOPLE, BUT IT SHALL BREAK IN PIECES AND CONSUME ALL THESE KINGDOMS, AND IT SHALL STAND FOREVER.

DANIEL ii. 44.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake, in time past, unto the fathers by the prophets," was pleased to make several important revelations concerning things to come. Amongst those by whom he chose to reveal to his people the mysteries of futurity, Daniel was not the least highly favoured. He was of the number of those whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, captured at the siege of Jerusalem, and carried away with him to his own dominions. But the God whom he served was with him there; and although he was deprived of the privileges, and cut off from the endearments of his own native land, yet even when a captive in a foreign country, he was raised to the highest station of honor and influence. By the good hand of the Lord, which was continually upon him, he was brought into great favour with the king; and such was

the spirit of wisdom and understanding he possessed, that in all matters of importance he was the king's most confidential advisor. It was while a captive in Babylon that he delivered those prophecies, which have been viewed by the Church in every age as of the highest importance, and were of special benefit to the Jewish people at that eventful period of their history. The greater part of the nation were at this time captives in Babylon, whither the Lord had permitted them to be carried, as a punishment for their sins; and whatever hopes they might have previously entertained, as being the chosen people of God, must have now been cut off in consequence of their deplorable condition. With many a fallen tear did they remember Zion; surrounded with the most gloomy prospects, with what sad emotions did they think of former joys, now no longer theirs. They still prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy; but they scarcely dare entertain the hope of ever being permitted to re-visit the delightful scenes of their native land, of placing their feet within the gates of their beloved city, and of going up with the tribes of Israel to worship in the temple. But Daniel, favoured with the visions of God, looked through the intervening mists and clouds to the clear sky beyond. Confident himself in the certainty of the accomplishment of the promises of God, he encourages his captive brethren to expect their deliverance from captivity and restoration to their own land. But *his* prospective vision extended farther still; he looked beyond the mere temporal deliverance of his own nation, and the re-establishment of the kingdom of Judah; his eye was attracted to gaze upon an object of higher importance, even that of the spiritual deliverance of the whole human family, and the establishment of the Messiah's dominion; and how necessary were these revelations to the Jewish people at this gloomy period! They were now suffering for their sins.

They had forfeited their liberty for a season by their disobedience. But theirs were the promises still. God had not cast away Israel forever; their punishment was but corrective and for a time; and to sustain their expiring faith, while surrounded by this shadow of its death, they are assured by the prophetic visions of Daniel, their fellow captive, that all the designs of God concerning them would be accomplished.

The first of the prophecies of Daniel, and that which may be considered as the foundation of all the rest, is the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The circumstances which gave rise to this event are briefly related by the prophet himself.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, having made many and extensive conquests, and being settled in quiet and secure possession of the throne of his mighty empire, directed his thoughts to the contemplation of futurity. While upon his bed he was revolving in his mind what should afterwards come to pass; what should be the future condition of his family, and what kingdoms should arise after his own. These reveries were succeeded by dreams, by which his mind was greatly troubled, and his sleep departed from him. A message was hastily sent to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, men who professed to be possessed of skill and understanding in the interpretation of dreams. They readily obeyed the summons, expecting, no doubt, by their ingenuity, to be able to conceal their ignorance of futurity. They appeared before the king, and the king said unto them, "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream." With all the confidence of *self-assurance* they reply, "Tell thy servants the dream and we will show the interpretation." But so indistinctly were the traces of the dream left upon his memory, that he was utterly unable to

relate it to them. He therefore answered, "The thing is gone from me; if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill." They expostulate with him upon the unreasonableness of his request, and remonstrate against the injustice of the decree, declaring that there is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter, nor can another king be found to make a demand so unreasonable. Upon this reply the haughty spirit of the king was roused; unaccustomed to opposition, he could not well bear this refusal of the magicians to comply with his unjust demands, and in his fury, he issues the cruel order to slay all the wise men of Babylon. And as tyrants have instruments always ready to execute their orders, however unjust or cruel, no sooner did the decree of the king go forth, than the agents of his cruelty commenced their bloody work.

Daniel and his three innocent companions being numbered with the wise men of Babylon, are sought by these king-commissioned murderers, as the objects of his senseless frenzy. Daniel, hitherto unacquainted with what had taken place, inquired of Arioch, the person whom the king had appointed to execute his murderous decree, "why is the decree of the king so hasty?" and being informed of the matter, he desired that a little time might be given him, and he would show unto the king the interpretation. Daniel went immediately to his own house, and made the thing known unto his three companions, and in answer to their united prayers, the dream and the interpretation are revealed unto Daniel in a vision of the night. Having obtained an audience with the king, he with deep humility acknowledges, that it is not on account of any superior wisdom of his own that he was able to tell the king his dream, and to make known unto him the interpretation,

but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. "Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these: As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter; and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any man living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

"Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image! This image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, and his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay and brake them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them, and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

This is the dream, and in the interpretation Daniel informs the king, that the image formed of four different kinds of metal represented four great monarchies which would successively arise after each other, whose comparative wealth, refinement, and power, would be similar to the materials of which the image representing them was composed. But ere these monarchies shall have passed away, and particularly while the last of the four is yet standing, undiminished in its strength, another kingdom shall arise, different from any of the former, whose

supernatural commencement is represented in the vision of the king, by the stone cut out without the application of the artist's hand. This kingdom, so different from every other, in its beginning, was designed to possess the same diversity of character throughout its entire existence; and the time of its erection, the stability of its power, the unchangeableness of its administration, the extent of its conquests, and the length of its duration, are thus expressed by Daniel in the words of the text:

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

I. The first thing to which our attention is directed in considering this subject, is the time referred to by the phrase, "*In the days of these kings.*" The great and terrible figure seen by the king in the vision, Daniel informs him, is designed to represent human power and dominion, and the various metals of which it was composed, to typify the various kingdoms which would arise. It consisted of four different metals, gold, silver, brass, and iron, mixed with clay; and these four metals, according to Daniel's own interpretation, signify so many kingdoms, and the order of their succession is clearly denoted by the relation of the several parts of the image, the head and higher parts signifying the earlier, and the lower parts the later times.

The head of this image was of fine gold, and this, Daniel says, represented the then existing monarchy; as in his interpretation he addresses Nebuchadnezzar the king, "Thou art this head of gold," Dan. ii. 38. The Babylonian empire was therefore represented by this head of gold, being a very proper emblem of it, on account of its great wealth; and Babylon, the metropolis of the empire, is for the same reason called by

Titian, "The golden city." Isaiah xiv. 4. "*The breast and the arms of silver,*" Daniel thus interprets, "*After thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee.*"

In consulting the page of history, we find that the kingdom which arose next after that of the Babylonians (or Chaldeans), was the Medo-Persian. The two arms and shoulders, Josephus says, signify that the empire of the Babylonians should be dissolved by two kings. These two kings were those of the Medes and Persians, whose powers were united in the person of Cyrus, who was the son of one of those kings, and the son-in-law of the other. He besieged and took Babylon, put an end to that empire, and upon its ruins erected the Medo-Persian, or the Persian, as it is more usually called,—the Persians soon having gained the ascendancy over the Medes.

The prophet in his interpretation goes on to say, "*And another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.*" To no other kingdom does this description so properly apply as to the Macedonian. Alexander the Great subverted the Persian empire and set up the Macedonian in its stead, and this was very fitly represented by brass, the Greeks being famous for their brazen armour, and their most usual epithet was—"O, χαλκοχιτῶνες Ἀχαιοί,"—the brazen-coated Greeks. This third kingdom is said to bear rule over all the earth; and to all who are acquainted with history, it is well known that so extensive were the conquests of Alexander, that he commanded himself to be proclaimed king of all the world; not that he really conquered the whole world, but he had considerable dominions in all the three parts of the world then known; and, as a certain author (Arrian) remarks, "he appeared to himself and to those about him to be master of all, both earth and sea."

Concerning the fourth kingdom, represented by the legs and

feet of the image, there has been some diversity of opinion ; but a careful comparison of the interpretation given by the prophet, with the page of history, will lead to the only reasonable conclusion, that there is no nation to which this description is applicable but the Roman. The Roman empire was next in succession to the Macedonian ; it was stronger and larger than any of the preceding, and the Romans brake in pieces and subdued all the former kingdoms. As Josephus has remarked, that the two arms of silver denoted the kings of the Medes and Persians, so in like manner it may be said that the two legs of iron signified the two Roman Consuls. This empire was at length divided into ten kingdoms, answering to the ten toes of the image. These kingdoms retained much of the old Roman strength, and manifested it on several occasions, so that the kingdom was partly strong and partly broken.

Having thus passed as briefly as possible through this necessary reference to the history connected with this subject, we find that the time referred to in the text is in the days of these Roman kings ; for, immediately after speaking of the division of the fourth monarchy into ten kingdoms, answering to the number of the toes upon the feet of the image, the prophet adds, "In the days of these kings"—evidently meaning those of whom he had last spoken—"shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom."

This is, doubtless, to be understood as descriptive of the kingdom of the Messiah, or the Gospel dispensation, which is frequently called a kingdom. Four kingdoms are reckoned in succession, and consequently this is the fifth, and accordingly we find that the kingdom of Christ was set up in the days of these kings, while the Roman empire was yet standing in its full strength. The erection of this kingdom is ascribed to the God of heaven, and the very manner in which it is here intro-

duced is sufficient to arrest the attention. In the rise, progress, government, and fall of all these empires, nothing but man is seen. Man is celebrated as the author of their existence, he alone is emblazoned in the pages of their history; and to the exercise of his wisdom and power are ascribed all their achievements. Or if a superior power is at all acknowledged, the gods of these kingdoms are nothing more than the mere creations of their own fancy, and man appears alone as the Alpha and the Omega, the sole originating and continuing cause of their existence. But in this kingdom it is totally different; man disappears, and God alone is seen. Human agency is indeed seen employed, but in such a manner, that the work is the work of God alone. The stone was a thing totally different from the image, it made its first appearance in a supernatural manner, and the kingdom of Christ is entirely different from the kingdoms of this world. Again, as this kingdom was set up by the God of heaven, it is therefore called the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, and this appellation is generally used to signify the kingdom of the Messiah. When our Saviour begun his public ministry, he told the people that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; and in his inimitable form of prayer he directs his disciples, when addressing their heavenly Father, to pray "Thy kingdom come." Other kingdoms were raised by human ambition and worldly power, but this stands in striking contrast, not as the work of man, but of God, and is therefore, as it is truly called, "The kingdom of heaven," a kingdom not of this world. In short, in whatever sense we understand this phrase, it appears equally true. The sovereign, the laws, and the powers of this kingdom are all divine.

This kingdom here spoken of, set up by the God of heaven, is doubtless to be understood as referring to the Gospel dispen-

sation. It is very properly called a kingdom. Its king is the Lord Jesus Christ; its laws, all the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel; and its subjects, those who by faith in Christ have obtained a reconciliation to God, and who live in obedience to his holy commandments. He reigns spiritually enthroned in their hearts, and receives from them the acceptable tribute of constant obedience and love.

In its visible character this kingdom is the Christian Church, and the subjects of it, all who are really and truly connected with any of its various branches.

But there is another and more particular sense in which this phrase is used in the Holy Scriptures, denoting that spiritual change wrought in the soul by the agency of the Holy Spirit, whereby the enmity of the heart is destroyed, the affections sanctified, and the moral nature of man entirely renewed. When Christ was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he replied, "That it cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or lo, there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you." Luke xvii. 21. And the apostle Paul in speaking of the same thing, says,—“The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Rom. xiv. 17. Were we to attempt a description of the excellencies of this kingdom, our attention would first be directed to the character of its king. His dignity is no less than that of the Son of God; nay, he is called the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and consequently in him dwell supremely all the excellencies of the Eternal Mind.

I. He is wise. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Col. ii. 3. Such is the boundlessness of his wisdom, that he is never at a loss how to proceed in the administration of his government. He sees the end from the

beginning, and knows well how to adopt the most proper regulations for the welfare of his subjects; and out of the fullness of his wisdom he imparts to his people. "If any man lack wisdom," says the apostle James, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." James i. 5.

2. He is good. And what could have a more powerful effect to convince us of the benevolent disposition of a sovereign towards his subjects, than to see him sacrifice his ease, his pleasures, his wealth, and even his life, for the good of his people? And yet all this we behold in the monarch of this kingdom. "He who was rich, for our sakes became poor," not by necessity, but of choice: having but the one noble object in view, that we through his voluntary humiliation and poverty might be rich. 2 Cor. viii. 9. We see him laying aside for a time his glory, his ease, and his pleasure, to endure reviling and reproach, to spend wearisome nights and days of labour and sorrow. We see him exchanging the honours of a throne, for the humble station of a servant; the pleasures of a paradise, for the sorrows of a sinful world; the hallelujahs of the heavenly host, for the scoffs of wicked men; the dignity and authority of a judge, for the shameful condition of a criminal; and finally, as the crowning act of his goodness, we behold him giving up the pleasures of his own inherent life, to endure the anguish of a cruel death. Hitherto his tears had told his love, his labours had expressed his benevolence, the hearts of many gladdened by his mercy bore witness to his kindness, the garden watered with his sweat testified the fervency of his desire for the welfare of his people; but when every other form of expression was exhausted, he bade the cross declare, in language of blood, the intenseness of his love. It is true that all this might be done by a mere earthly sovereign, whose subjects

are loving and obedient ; his affection for them may lead him to sacrifice his all in their defence, but thus far only will humanity proceed : " Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John xv. 13. But he made not this sacrifice for friends and loyal subjects, but for his enemies, for rebels against his government. He laid down his life for those very persons who put him to death ; and to convince even his very murderers that their cruelty had not quenched his love, he made them the first offer of pardon. Oh, hear him saying to the first messengers of his mercy, "Go to all and tell them of my goodness ; go preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations, but *begin at Jerusalem*. Tell my most cruel enemies first, of my willingness to pardon and confer on them the honour of my peculiar favour."

3. He is powerful. "All power," says he, "is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Mat. xxiii. 13. And even at a time when he appeared to be forsaken of all, and when his majesty was hidden under the veil of his humiliation and suffering, we hear him declare that legions of angels were at his command, (Matt. xxvi. 53,) waiting on ready wing to execute his orders, either to destroy his enemies, or to rescue him from their power. Possessed of almighty power, he is a sure defence of his people ; and against those whom he preserves, no enemy, however powerful, can prevail.

4. But lastly, He is just. I know that this trait of his character has been most strangely and shamefully misrepresented, and that, too, even by professed subjects of his kingdom. He has been described as being more cruel than a Nero, as binding the fate, and sealing the eternal misery of millions, whom he himself has created for an immortality of existence, excluding them forever from the remotest possibility of

enjoying his favour and the blessings of his kingdom, and for no other reason than because such is his own good pleasure.

There are those from whose testimony we form a different and far more favourable opinion concerning the character of this King: "Behold," says the prophet Isaiah, (xxxii. 1,) "a King shall reign in righteousness. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. Isa. xi. 5. And Zechariah exclaims, (ix. 9,) "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just." The justice of his character, and the equitable nature of his administration, are beautifully described by David in the seventy-second Psalm: "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and the needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight."

The grand excellency of this kingdom, and that which renders it so different from every other is, its spiritual nature. "My kingdom," said the Redeemer, "is not of this world." John xviii. 36. The design of its erection was not merely the temporal happiness of a single nation or people, but the spiritual and eternal felicity of the whole family of man.

Men by nature are enemies to God, and consequently foes to their own peace and happiness; but by the institutions of this kingdom their enmity is destroyed, and they are made the partakers of that bliss for which they were created. By means of the gracious provision made in the erection of this kingdom, they are delivered from the power of the prince of darkness, the spiritual dominion of Christ is erected in their hearts, he reigns in them, and by his grace controls their wills, sanctifies their affections, and binds them by the loyalty of love to his sacred throne. They who were once not only aliens, but even enemies and rebels, are, by the subduing and renewing grace of this heavenly King, made fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household (or kingdom) of God. Strange and inconsistent as it may appear, the subjects of this kingdom are all those who have been guilty both of treason against the Sovereign and rebellion against his government. It is generally supposed that persons of such a character can never become loyal subjects of any kingdom; but not so in this kingdom. Its most inveterate enemies are, when subdued, generally found among its most devoted and loyal subjects. Do we wish a proof of this assertion? What was Saul of Tarsus, but a zealous opposer and murderer of its subjects? and what was Paul the apostle, but a powerful defender and a successful advocate of this kingdom?

The whole Scripture history of this kingdom shows but one design in its erection, and that was the restoration of man to the forfeited favour of his Creator, his deliverance from the power and defilement of sin, that thus he might be prepared to inherit the everlasting pleasures of the kingdom of glory.

II. This kingdom the text says, was never to be destroyed.

Of no merely earthly kingdom can this be said. They owe their origin to human power, or ambition, and derive their

support from the same source, and must necessarily partake more or less of the nature of the cause by which they were produced. The materials of which they are formed possess within themselves the elemental principles of their own destruction. Pride, ambition, and worldly aggrandizement, are generally found to enter in, and to form the very bone and sinew of every earthly monarchy, and in proportion according as these prevail, will their stability be endangered. What we ask is the subject of every page of history, but the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires? We see here and there a kingdom or empire progressively advancing to a degree of stability, and power of defence, apparently sufficient to defy the attacks of any invading foe, however hostile or powerful, but suddenly has its strength departed, and left as a resistless and easy prey to an inferior force.

Babylon once could challenge the nations to combat, but it yielded at length to the destroyer an unresisting captive. This mighty empire was destroyed by the Medes and Persians: their empire was next overthrown by the Macedonians, and these last in their turn were conquered by the Romans. These are but a few of the numerous instances of the destruction of worldly empires; and here too we behold the cause of their ruin was the power of an invading foe. But even where this cause does not appear, their destruction is not the less certain. Like as the walls of a stately edifice, even when built of the most durable materials, and untouched by the spoiler's hand, will in the progress of time tumble to the ground, so will every earthly monarchy be finally dissolved from the very nature of the materials of which they are composed.

Now, this kingdom is here presented in happy and striking contrast to every other. Other kingdoms were set up by man;

this was the work of God ; others after existing a limited period were broken in pieces and scattered, but this shall never be destroyed. As this kingdom is the work of the God of Heaven, it must necessarily partake of the nature of its Founder. The imperishable materials of which it is composed, the dignity of its King, the excellence of its laws, and the character of its subjects, are peculiarities of this kingdom which might lead us to entertain the strongest hopes of its permanent duration. But when we consider the mighty efforts that have been made, not only to prevent its erection, but also to destroy it root and branch, its long existence, upon natural principles of reasoning would be pronounced impossible. Against no other kingdom has there ever been such a united array of opposition. At its commencement, hostility to it was almost universal ; and, through every period of its existence the combined powers of earth and hell have been perseveringly employed to effect its overthrow. Kings and Emperors have arrayed themselves against it, they have taken counsel together, and joined in unholy league to blot out from under heaven even the very memorial of its existence. They have triumphed over its supposed destruction, and erected monuments, as they imagined, of its perpetual ruin.

To withstand and to overcome this mighty phalanx of opposition, it possesses no disciplined legions, no political force, or engine of destructive warfare. And yet it clings to its favorite hope, that it shall never be destroyed. It is true indeed that its means of defence do not appear to be sufficient to withstand the force of opposition in active array against it, but still its watchward is, "Never to be destroyed."

Where then, is the secret of its defence ? That it has hitherto withstood every attack of its foes is a fact of which we are

the witnesses, but who can unfold the mystery? The Lord our God in the midst of it is mighty, his protection has ever been as a wall of fire round about it.

When this kingdom was first set up, and when to all human appearance it stood upon a tottering basis, even then the decree was established, "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Then, too, the song was sung, "We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint *for* walls and bulwarks." Isaiah xxvi. 1. And by the Apostle Paul it is called emphatically, "A kingdom which cannot be moved." Heb. xii. 23.

And what stronger reason can we wish to have, upon which to ground our expectation that it will never be destroyed, than the delightful fact, that it has hitherto stood unmoved? Already more than eighteen hundred years have its means of defence proved more than sufficient to resist every hostile attack, and to put to flight the armies of the aliens. It is true, indeed, that some of the subjects of this kingdom have fallen in the contest, but they have fallen, not as conquered foes, but as victorious heroes; their very dying shouts have increased the courage of their fellow soldiers, and alarmed the prince of darkness upon his ghostly tribunal, and shaken the pillars of his dreary domains. The most extensive and powerful combinations have been formed in vain to effect its destruction, the sneers of the infidel, the rage and the malice of the wicked, and the treachery of pretended friends, with all their united force, have proved too feeble to demolish even the weakest parts of its bulwarks of defence. Well then may the subjects of this kingdom entertain the hope that it will never be destroyed. If every previous attempt of its enemies to effect its ruin has not only proved unsuccessful, but even recoiled with terrible vengeance upon their own

heads, we may reasonably conclude that every future attempt will share the same fate, and when all the artillery of opposing forces is discharging upon it its heaviest fire, the motto of the subjects of this kingdom shall resound with echoes of triumph, "It shall never be destroyed."

III. The text farther says, "And the kingdom shall not be left to other people."

How different is it in this respect from every other kingdom: seldom does it happen that a government continues long in the possession of any one people. Human dominions are perpetually changing from one nation to another; like as the Babylonian Empire passed into the hands of the Persians, their empire was next possessed by the Macedonians, and this last was taken by the Romans; and these different dominions, though situated in the same region, at each successive change were essentially lost, both in their nature and name, from the character of the people by whom they were possessed. In casting our eyes over the chart of history, the constant changes in human governments which have taken place in every age, are strikingly apparent. Here we see one kingdom existing for a short period, and then passing into the hands of another people, and this in a little time bearing the name of a different nation, none continuing for any considerable space in the possession of a people of the same name and character. But in this kingdom set up by the God of heaven it is totally different. This will continue in the possession of the same people through every age; and in all essential regulations it will retain a uniformity of character. Its King will never vacate his throne, "The Lord will be king in Zion forever," and under his immediate superintendence will the affairs of this government be administered. Men will indeed be employed in this kingdom as agents in executing or carrying

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forward its plans, but in such a manner that the government will be as really of God as its establishment.

But as this kingdom is different throughout its entire nature from the kingdoms of this world, so are its subjects different from those of every other ; and the people to whom alone this kingdom is left are the people of God, a nation which he has prepared for the possession of this spiritual dominion. Hence we are told by Daniel that " The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." Dan. vii. 13. And again he says,—“ And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.” Dan. vii. 27. The apostle Peter, when describing the people to whom this kingdom is left, says : “ Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (or a purchased) people ; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light : Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God ; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” 1 Peter, ii. 9–10.

The lawful possessors of this kingdom, then, are those who have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's own dear Son. It belongs to them not merely by virtue of inheritance, but more especially by right of fitness. This is emphatically the kingdom of God, they are the people of God ; this is a kingdom not of this world, they are not of this world ; this is a spiritual kingdom, they are a spiritual people ; the laws of God are the statutes of this kingdom, their delight is in the law of God : and these are the only persons to whom the affairs of this kingdom can be properly entrusted. None others are possessed of the qualifications necessary to understand its nature, and to

administer its affairs correctly. However men may be skilled in science, and learned in the wisdom of this world, they understand not the things concerning the kingdom of God, unless to their worldly wisdom they add the wisdom which cometh from above. It would be easy to prove the truth of this assertion by referring to the sacred oracles. We hear the Lord Jesus Christ declaring to Nicodemus, a learned ruler or teacher among the Jews,—“Except a man be born again (or from above) he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John iii. 3. The apostle Paul to the Corinthians asserts that “The world by wisdom knew not God.” 1 Cor. i. 21. And again, to the same polished people, he says,—“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” ii. 14. The legal heirs of this kingdom are those in whose hearts it is established, who have been made acquainted with its mysteries by receiving the spirit of its Founder or King, the Lord Jesus Christ. None are qualified to take a part in the affairs of this kingdom but such as are really and truly the subjects of it. Men may boast of their descent, of their learning, or of the uninterrupted succession of the authority by which they were appointed to hold office in this kingdom, but unless they can furnish some higher proofs than these of the legality of their appointment—even proofs that they are experimentally initiated into the spiritual mysteries of this kingdom—they have neither right nor title to their assumed station; and until these necessary epistles of their commendation are known and read, they should be considered in their true character, as aliens and intruders. This may be thought by some uncharitably severe. Be it so. But while our severity is so far exceeded by the recorded declaration of Christ himself, we have no cause for any serious alarm. In the tenth

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chapter of the Gospel by St. John, his kingdom is compared to a sheep-fold, and himself the only door of entrance; and he there says,—“Verily I say unto you, He that entereth not in by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.” John x. 1.

To this one people this kingdom is left, a nation of characters, rather than of name. As the real spiritual people of God are the only proper persons to whom this kingdom can be left, so are they the only ones. “It is your Father’s good pleasure,” said Christ to *his disciples*, “to give you the kingdom.” Luke xii. 32. And to his apostles particularly, as the ambassadors of this kingdom, in his last bequest he said, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.” Luke xxii. 29. It is the rich inheritance of the people of God; that which shall never be taken from, nor given to, any other. They alone possess a title and a meetness for the enjoyment of the spiritual blessings which constitute the peculiar glory of this kingdom, and for the bestowment of which it has been set up.

IV. Another characteristic of this kingdom is its irresistible increase, and is thus expressed by the prophet, “It shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms.”

The progressive extension, and universal spread of the Messiah’s kingdom, is frequently mentioned in the sacred volume, and is represented by a variety of figures. In one place it is compared to leaven, hid in a quantity of meal, which, by a slow and silent process, infuses its virtues into every part, until the whole partakes of the nature of the leaven.

And, again, it is said; “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed cast into the ground; which, although the least of all seeds, by the gradual yet percep-

tive progress of vegetation, becomes a great tree, affording shelter to the fowls of heaven. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the Messiah's reign, says, "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end." Isaiah ix. 7.

In these inspired descriptions of the increase of this spiritual kingdom, it is represented as peacefully winning its widening way, and gradually extending its dominion by the constraining power of its own inherent excellencies. But the grand peculiarity of this kingdom, as it respects its enlargement, is its aggressive character. Not merely was it designed to possess the means of its own defence, but also to be furnished with force necessary to make extensive and illustrious conquests over the uncompromisingly hostile kingdoms of this world. It is true, indeed, that, to the eye of human reason, it does not appear to be armed with power sufficient to insure success in making aggressive movements against the more ostensibly powerful kingdoms of this world: but still the decree must stand, "It shall break in pieces, and consume" every other. And to show the supernatural manner in which these conquests were to be effected, was the appearance of the stone in the vision of the king. Here was an effect without the appearance of any sufficient cause to produce it. The stone is cut out of the mountain, but no hands are seen; it breaks in pieces materials of a nature more solid than itself; but no superior power appears. The stone not only remains unbroken by its contact with these harder substances, but even continues to increase, until it becomes a great mountain, and fills the whole earth. Now all this was done not only without the appearance of any sufficient cause, but even contrary to reason. In the conquests of this kingdom the manner

is the same. The power by which they are effected is a power unseen, though revealed. Human agency *is seen* employed in pushing forward the conquests of this kingdom; but a Divine power, *unseen*, renders that agency successful. But how apparently inadequate the means employed to obtain the end proposed! Had any person believed, in the days of our Saviour's ministry on earth, that the kingdom he was about to establish would exist even for a limited period, he would have been considered a visionary theorist. Had he asserted that it would finally prevail over every other, his words would have been esteemed but as the frantic ravings of a madman. A despised Galilean and a few Jewish peasants, of neither note nor influence, were the only visible agents employed in erecting this kingdom. They had to contend with the incurable bigotry of the Jewish nation, united to the superstitions of the Roman people; the chief priests, and pharisees, and civil rulers of every grade were in combined and active array against them. Yet, notwithstanding the inadequateness of the cause, how astonishing the effects produced! The Roman empire, composed of the substance of the whole image, was soon broken in pieces; the established superstitions of the people were in a little time subverted, although they had been rendered venerable through age, and had acquired dignity from common sanction; thus introducing or effecting a moral revolution throughout this extensive empire. In one day three thousand notorious enemies were made the subjects of this kingdom. Wherever the first ambassadors unfurled their banners, multitudes flocked to the standard of their king, so that in a short time, it might be said, these kingdoms were broken in pieces and their moral constitution and

appearance entirely changed. True, the instruments in themselves were insufficient for the purpose, and yet the effect was produced. But a more powerful agency than we discover in natural causes was at work; or the kingdom of Christ, instead of advancing victoriously against the most powerful opposition, must have been buried in its own insignificance. That agency was the power of God. The contest here spoken of is of such a nature that nothing less than the power of God can render it successful. It is not the contest of parties, but of principles. It is the contest of truth against error, holiness against sin, light against darkness, the kingdom of *heaven* against the kingdom of the devil. And this contest will ultimately prevail on the side of truth. However doubtful at times the cause of Christ may have appeared, the victory is certain. The first agents of this contest could triumphantly say, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. x. 4-5. Armed with divine virtue, the Gospel, secret, silent, and unobserved, enters the hearts of men, and sets up an everlasting kingdom. It eludes all the vigilance, and baffles all the power of the adversary. Bars, bolts, and dungeons are no obstacles to its approach; bonds, tortures, or death cannot extinguish its influence.

But leaving for a moment the figurative meaning of these words, we have here a prediction of the universal and triumphant spread of the Gospel, or kingdom of Christ, and the final prevalence of the pure doctrines of Christianity over every system of error. And in exact accordance with this interpre-

tation of these words are several of the other inspired predictions. David, in the second Psalm, referring to the universal spread of the Messiah's dominion, represents the Father as speaking to the Son, and saying, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." And he did ask, in the language of the cross, a prayer of streaming blood; and that prayer was heard; the rending rocks felt its power, the blushing sun could not bear to behold the agony with which that prayer was offered. The prince of darkness, too, heard that prayer, and felt it as he heard, while he read in that petition the ruin of his own kingdom. But aware of the mighty opposing force against which these moral conquests would be obtained. He further adds, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." In the seventy-second Psalm reference is made to the same subject, when he says, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him." John, the Revelator, when beholding in prophetic vision what would certainly come to pass, declares, that "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Rev. xi. 15. Various other passages might be quoted to prove that the expectation entertained by the subjects of this kingdom, of its universal dominion, rests upon the surest foundation, the immutable promises of God. But we are taught by the words of the text, that the universal dominion of the kingdom of Christ will be one of conquest and not of treaty. We would be among the last to

advocate or even justify aggressive warfare; nay, we believe it to be absolutely and unconditionally wrong for one nation or people to make hostile attacks upon another for the purpose of making conquests; but in this kingdom the case is entirely different, and the very charter by which its subjects enjoy their liberties, compels them to make aggressive movements against the kingdoms of this world. They possess the only artillery by which every other kingdom is to be broken in pieces and consumed, and that is the artillery of Gospel truth. They hold in their hands the only weapon to whose conquering power a rebellious world will submit, and that weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. "Go into all the world," is the command of the Sovereign of this kingdom, and take with you the weapons of your warfare: "Go preach the Gospel to every creature." I give you an unlimited commission, and full authority to storm every garrison of my revolted subjects, to assault and batter down every strong hold of the kingdom of darkness, enter every territory of the enemy, and cease not from urging forward your victorious movements until the last hostile region is subdued. Your weapons are these: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John iii. 16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark xvi. 16. These are the only instruments of warfare I give you with which to destroy the uncompromising hostility of the world. But the inquiry may be made, "Can we reasonably hope that the kingdom of Christ will yet finally prevail?" We answer, we can. And even were we not assured of this by the unfailing promise of Jehovah, arguing from what has already been done towards the accomplishment of this glorious event, we might conclude the certainty of its final triumph.

From its commencement how steadily, and, at times, how rapidly, has the kingdom of the God of heaven advanced against all the opposition with which it has been assailed. And when we consider the present accelerated movements of the Redeemer's kingdom towards its appointed destination of universal conquest, we entertain no fearful apprehensions respecting the final issue. Never before, perhaps, were its prospects more cheering, or the victories of the cross more extensive and illustrious. In heathen lands the ensigns of this kingdom have been erected; a longer line of battle than ever before was seen is now set in array, and hundreds and thousands of the devoted victims of the prince of darkness are almost daily becoming the willing captives of the cross. It never was more dangerous than now to be the enemy of Christ's kingdom. All such must speedily yield to the victorious power of the Gospel, or be crushed beneath that chariot in which the Son of God is riding in triumph through the vast dominions of a conquered empire.

There was a time when the cause of Christ wore a doubtful aspect, when even the most stout-hearted men were led to tremble; but that time has gone by, and none are afraid now but cowards. Can we see what is doing and yet doubt? Can we hear of the heralds of the Gospel planting the standard of the cross in the very centre of the enemy's camp and yet be afraid? Can we hear of the breaking of the long-cherished heathen superstitions, of the idol-gods of nations tumbling from their lofty thrones, and yet doubt that the time will soon arrive when there shall be one Lord, and his name one? Already has idolatrous Asia received the missionaries of the cross, and her Moloch, with all his cursed family of gods, sickens at the prospect. The darkest places of his empire are now casting a lighter shade, and the sceptre he has so long

held with undisputed right begins to tremble in his palsied hand. Ethiopia is stretching out her hands to God, and embracing the messengers of salvation; and the isles, which have so long and anxiously waited for the law are joyfully exclaiming, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that bring good tidings." Isaiah lii. 7.

The decree has gone forth that this kingdom shall prevail over every other; and although its prospects may sometimes assume a doubtful, or even a fearful aspect, yet we dare not doubt. Its final triumph is certain, and its universal conquests very near. The stone is rolling through the earth, and increasing as it rolls; already has it reached to every quarter of the globe, and, even at its present rate of increase, the time must soon arrive when, grown to its mountain size, it will fill the whole earth.

But there is another point to which our attention is directed ere we leave this part of the subject, and it is this,—The aggressive force of this kingdom is not directed against the political constitution of any civil government. "We wrestle not," says the Apostle Paul, "against flesh and blood," (Ephes. vi. 12,) and there is no principle in Christianity which justifies an attack upon the civil institutions of any country. But although the kingdom of Christ does not primarily seek to change human governments, merely as such, yet wherever it extends, it exerts a more or less powerful influence upon them. And if we examine the records of the past, we will find that wherever the principles of the Gospel are embraced, or even known, there the absolute tyranny of despotism gives way; the arbitrary character of heathen legislation is exchanged for the milder and more beneficial exercise of power, guided by the pure precepts of Christianity. To what are we indebted for the excellent

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character of our civil and political institutions? Why are we not under the iron rule of a tyrant's will? I know that some will say the wisdom of our legislators has given us our mild and wholesome laws. But our reply is, That we are wholly indebted to the kingdom of Christ, to the influence of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, for the happy condition in which we are placed. And when the kingdom of the God of heaven shall universally prevail, then will kings be the nursing fathers, and queens the nursing mothers of their people, and the world will present the pleasing sight of rulers and subjects seeking each other's good, and by their mutual endeavours for each other's welfare, embrace the whole in the arms of a happy and rejoicing family.

V. Lastly. The final characteristic of this kingdom is, "*It shall stand forever.*"

How greatly is the glory of every earthly object shaded by the shortness of its duration! We gaze with delight upon a splendid edifice, but how soon the mournful reflection rushes upon us, "A little time, and it will be seen no more." Luke xxi. 5, 6. We contemplate with pleasure the excellencies and virtues of our friends; but we are forced at the same time to entertain the saddening thought, that they will soon droop and die. But in surveying this spiritual building, the kingdom of Christ, we find no inscription upon it denoting its destruction or decay. The pleasure we derive from a contemplation of its beauty is not destroyed by anticipating its end. With all its excellencies and glory it will stand forever.

Under whatever aspect we view this kingdom we find it entirely different from the kingdom of this earth. We have noticed its pleasing diversity of character in other respects as we passed along; the only peculiarity which now remains to be noticed is the unlimited duration of its existence. Other

kingdoms, from their very nature must necessarily have an end; but this for the same reason must stand forever. There are two particular points in the description of this kingdom which, if attentively considered, will lead to this conclusion. And, first, it is said, that it shall never be destroyed; and, second, that it shall break in pieces and consume every other. Now, since it is furnished with the means of its own defence, and armed with the force necessary to make universal conquest; as it cannot therefore be overthrown, and must continually increase, the natural conclusion is, it must stand forever. Other express declarations of inspiration attest the same truth, that this is a kingdom which will have no end. Isaiah says, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever." Isaiah ix. 7. Daniel says the kingdom shall be given to "the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." Dan. vii. 27. And again, in the same chapter, he says, "I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. Verse 13, 14.

We have before noticed the dissolution of human empires, some by one means, and some by another: one cause of their destruction yet remains to be noticed. Even their prosperity is sometimes the cause of their overthrow; and when eagerly pursuing the phantom object of universal empire, they sink beneath the incumbent weight of their own victories. But in

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the kingdom of Christ the case will be far otherwise. Every fresh victory will add to its stability; every newly conquered territory will form a garrison, from which the armies of the living God shall go forth conquering and to conquer, until every hostile region is subdued, and there be nothing left to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain.

But the existence of this spiritual kingdom is not limited even by the utmost boundaries of time. It will be coeval with the days of heaven. It is doubtless to be considered as the introductory part to the kingdom of glory, established for the purpose of fitting man for the felicities of his future and eternal state. Man is destined for an immortality of existence, and when the short period of his earthly career is closed his state will be fixed unalterably for ever; and all those who have been the faithful subjects of this kingdom, or rather, all in whose hearts this kingdom has been established, will be subjects of the same for ever. The future blessedness of the saints of the Most High—the legal heirs of this kingdom—is not another state, but merely the perfection of the same. And as our poet has very beautifully expressed it:—

"Thee in thy glorious realm they praise,
And bow before thy throne;
We in the kingdom of thy grace,
The kingdoms are but one.

"The holy to the holiest leads,
From thence our spirits rise,
And he that in thy statutes treads,
Shall meet thee in the skies."

"*It shall stand for ever.*" How has the ingenuity of a hostile world been racked to erase this blessed truth "for ever" from the pages of Inspiration. A poor infidel fool chose for his watchword, "Crush the wretch,"—meaning, destroy the cause of Christianity—but he and his companions of the same school have long since learned that the kingdom of Christ must

and will stand, in spite of the united hostility of earth and hell. The God of heaven has decreed it, and it must be so : its foundation is as immovable as the pillars of heaven. And when earth and hell shall muster all their malignant forces in combined conspiracy against it, the triumphant echoes of the saints of God will still be heard resounding through earth and skies,—“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” Heb. i. 8.

As the last dispensation of the grace of God to man, it is called by the apostle Peter, “The everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter, i. 11. After this there will be no succession ; and immediately after the close of the gospel dispensation will commence the kingdom of eternal glory, the final and everlasting abode of all the faithful subjects of this kingdom of grace.

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SERMON VIII.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF CHRIST.

JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOREVER.
HEB. XIII. 8.

Such, then, is the unchangeable nature of Him who is set forth, as the only sure foundation, upon which the children of fallen Adam can build their hopes of an immortality of bliss beyond the present brief and precarious state of existence. Throughout the entire volume of inspiration one design is strikingly apparent, and that is, a revelation of the character of God, as he is manifested to the world in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. "To Him give all the prophets witness." Acts x. 43. He was the burden of every message brought to mankind by the revealing spirit; the object of pious faith in every age; the centre in which all the prophecies met, and in which they received their fulfillment; and to his sacrificial and sin-atonement death and perpetual intercession, all the symbols of the ceremonial law had reference; and by him these shadowy representations of good things to come, were displaced and exchanged for the substance. In the fullness of the appointed time, he, whose mediatorial work was represented by these mysterious allusions, made himself known by assuming

the human nature, and entered upon the performance of the important work of human redemption. "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us" and having accomplished the purpose of his incarnation, he ascended up on high, but not without first appointing the means to publish abroad the salvation he had procured for guilty man. He commanded his apostles to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Mark xvi. 13. In obedience to his command, they went: and what was the subject of their preaching? It was Jesus Christ. To some, indeed, it was foolishness, and to others a stumbling block; but to those who were awake to their danger, and concerned for their safety, it was the power of God and the wisdom of God: and what else can satisfy the awakened sinner? The dreaming moralist may be satisfied with a dry lecture on worldly ethics, and the merely nominal christian with a description of the rules of external christian conduct; and nothing can be more pleasing to the man of science than a discourse in which the principles and pleasures of science are clearly unfolded and luminously described. But to the sinner, convinced of his wretched and dangerous condition, these subjects afford no consolation, but rather increase his misery. Thus, does he hear of the laws of nature? he thinks of the laws of God which he has broken, and which condemn every transgressor to suffer eternal punishment. Does he hear described the wisdom and goodness of God, as displayed in the works of his hands? alas! he remembers that against this Being of wisdom and goodness he has sinned. Does he hear the duty of obedience enforced? the fearful denunciation of the law, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them," fills him with dismay. To him no subject is interesting but that which answers the important question, What must I do to be

saved? And that subject is the doctrine of the cross. Standing beneath the roar of Sinai's quaking brow, and the lightnings trembling over his unsheltered head, no voice attracts his attention but that which calls him away from impending ruin to a place of safety. That voice is the preaching of Christ. He indeed views in the doctrine of the cross the inflexible justice of God, and his unalterable hatred to sin; but there also he sees justice satisfied, and an atonement made for sin. Bearing before him therefore the propitiatory sacrifice of the cross, he dares to approach and claim the purchased pardon.

God has ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, and as there is none other name under heaven given among men by which we can obtain salvation but the name of Christ, it follows as a natural conclusion, without any process of reasoning, that Jesus Christ should be the theme of every sermon. This was the view taken by the Apostles of the manner and design of preaching. They preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. They determined not to know anything among men, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. They gloried in nothing save in the cross; and to whatever persecutions, distresses, or dishonour the preaching of the cross exposed them, it was their subject still. Did they preach to the polished Greeks? Christ was their subject. Did they preach to the haughty Romans? Christ was their theme. Did they reason with the self-righteous and bigoted Jews? the point to which they conducted all their arguments was to prove that he was the very Christ. In all their communications, salvation through Jesus Christ alone was their only topic; and very properly then does the author of this epistle say to those to whom he was writing, "Remember those who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto

you the Word of God ; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation ; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

There is but one subject contained in the text to which our attention is forcibly drawn, and that is the unchangeable perpetuity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in every respect interesting to the children of men.

The contemplation of one subject very commonly suggests, or is followed by its opposite. Thus do we meditate upon the immutability of God ? our thoughts turn to contemplate the frailty of man, the various changes through which he passes, and the dissolution to which he is destined. Do we think of the unfailing beauties and permanent pleasures of the future abode of the saints ? we are soon drawn to reflect upon the deformities and sorrows of our present habitation. The words of the text have thrown back our thoughts to the first dawn of creation, and in wandering over the whole tract of time, to mark the successive changes and certain decay to which all created things are subject. Of what else can it be said that "it is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever ?" Of man ? "Your fathers, where are they ? and the prophets, do they live forever ?" Zech. i. 5. They are gone, and have no more portion of anything that is done under the sun. Where are the sages and heroes of antiquity, those who astonished the world by their wisdom, and terrified the nations by their valour ? They have given their instructions, and fought their battles, and are gone. Of kingdoms and empires can it be said that they are the same ? Where now is Babylon ? Where are Greece and Rome ? those mighty empires which seemed once to stand upon an imperishable foundation : they have existed their appointed time, and are fallen ; they have passed like shadows over the rock ; they have successively disappeared,

and left scarcely a trace behind. Their names, it is true, still remain, but they are found in the same rolls that record their dissolution. Are cities the same? What now is the state of ancient Babylon? that great city whose strength seemed once proudly to defy the most destructive ravages of time. The cry has long since been heard, Babylon is fallen, is fallen. "We ask for Nineveh, and its place is not found; for Babylon, and we find only the literal accomplishment of the prophetic description, 'heaps and a dwelling place for dragons, without an inhabitant;' for ancient Rome, and we see the civilized world going to wonder at its ruins, and to read the plain inscription of grandeur and vanity." (Watson's Sermons.) And Jerusalem, once the joy of the whole earth, honoured with the appellation of the city of the Great King; where now is its magnificence and glory? Where are the splendid buildings of the temple, adorned with goodly stones and gifts? Its doom was foretold: "The days will come in which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Luke xxi. 6. And those days have long since come. But behold the instability of all things around us. Our friends and companions, how soon they leave us! Yesterday they were inhabitants of time, to-day of eternity. Yesterday we took sweet counsel with them; but to-day their tongue is silent in death. By such meditations we shall be led to value more highly the sure and unchanging foundation upon which we, as the expectants of immortality, are permitted to rest our hopes of endless life. We shall return from this survey of the rapid changes and certain decay to which all earthly things are subject, repeating, with a higher emphasis and more holy joy, the consoling truth, "Jesus Christ is the same." What though my friends leave me, in Him I have "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Prov. xviii. 24. What though I am deprived of my earthly possessions, and my riches make themselves wings and fly away, (Prov. xxiii. 5,) I know that through him I have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. And what though I must soon droop and die, and this tabernacle sink in ruinous decay, "I know that if my earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved I have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." 1 Cor. v. 1. In whatever respect we contemplate this illustrious character, he rises in our estimation, and appears more fully worthy of our unbounded confidence and love. He is the same then,—

I. In his Nature.

some Immutability belongs not to human nature in its fallen state. The voice of inspiration has declared that, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." 1 Peter i. 24. And if Jesus Christ be merely human he cannot sustain the character here given him. It is true he possessed a nature similar to man, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," but this human tabernacle was the dwelling-place of a superior nature. We have only to consult the sacred scriptures in order to arrive at a proper conclusion concerning the nature of Christ. To him are ascribed the works of creation, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." Col. i. 16-17. From this inspired testimony concerning Christ, we must conclude that whatever may be the dignity of his nature by the exertion of his own power, the heavens, and the earth, and all the host of them were formed. He spake, and at his word creation appeared; he commanded, and his command was obeyed. But one more

creator

proposition is necessary in order to form a logical conclusion concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. We have already proved by the inspired declaration that he is the Creator of all things. In the third chapter of this epistle, (Heb. iii. 4,) we are furnished with the proposition necessary to complete the argument. The Apostle there declares that "He who built (or created) all things is God." But Jesus Christ built (or created) all things: therefore Jesus Christ is God.

We have here a regular syllogism whose major and minor premises are truths of revelation, the conclusion is therefore inevitable. His nature is divine. It is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, and was from eternity an equal sharer with the Father in all the glories of the Godhead. And as God he is unchangeably the same; with him is neither variableness nor shadow of turning. He is not affected by those changes to which all created beings are subject. But what is the nature of God? God is love, says the inspired Apostle. And where is not this blessed truth inscribed in legible characters? The whole creation is a volume, and the subject of every chapter is love. His love was first manifested in the creation, and has continued uninterruptedly the same through all the lapse of time. The standard of every dispensation has been love, one continued and unchanged desire to render his creatures happy. But there is a more illustrious display of the love of God than appears in mere created nature, "herein is love," says the beloved Apostle. It would seem as though one exhibition of love brighter than the rest had shaded every other, and that one was the exhibition of the cross, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Even the sacred writers themselves, favoured as they were with the inspirations of the Holy Spirit do not attempt to describe the extent of this

love; they merely mention some of its effects, and find themselves utterly at a loss for terms sufficiently expressive to proceed any further. That was love indeed, defying all description, whose brightest form was seen amidst the noon-day darkness which covered Judea's favoured land; that was love, God incarnate dying for a rebel world, making peace by the blood of his cross, reconciling the offended God to offending man, by giving the innocent to suffer for the guilty, and thus preparing the materials to conquer and subdue the rebellious heart of man. And this love extends to all. How sung the inspired poet? "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Psa. cxlv. 9. Where do we find the limitation of his love? In the distribution of his temporal blessings? No, not there; "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matt. v. 45. The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all that be bowed down. He opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. The eyes of all wait upon him and he gives them their meat in due season. Psa. cxlv. 14. In the distribution of his spiritual blessings do we read the proscription of his love? Hear his own testimony, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye—why will ye die, O house of Israel." Ezek. xxxiii. 11, 12. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." Isa. lv. 1-3. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. xi. 28. And again, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever

*Inward
Love*

shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Rom. x. 12, 13. After such glowing representations of the love of God, and his goodness which extends to all, how exceedingly freezing is that doctrine which teaches us that the love of God is confined to a favoured few! And what a libel upon Him who has declared in all the operations of his hands that, his nature and his name are love. He is in this respect unchangeably the same, and to him we may return from the contemplation of a changing world, saying, "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Heb. i. 12.

II. He is the same in his Mediatorial Agency.

No sooner had man transgressed the Divine commandment than a mediator became necessary; one who should possess in himself all the qualities essential to make satisfaction to God in behalf of guilty man; and nearly coeval with the first transgression was the promise of a mediator who should unite in himself all the qualifications necessary to reconcile the world unto God. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; then he entered upon his priestly office, in which he has ever since continued; and will continue to discharge the duties of his station, until the last ransomed spirit shall celebrate the latest song of praise for his prevailing intercession. It is true that four thousand years elapsed from the time a mediator was promised, until he appeared among men in his true mediatorial character, the seed of the woman in the form of a servant; but he was nevertheless the same; and during this period his mediatorial agency was dimly shadowed forth by all the types, the figures, and symbolical representations of the ceremonial law. The grand design of this epistle is to give a true representation of the priesthood of Christ, and to show that the institutions of the ceremonial law were but the shadows of good things to come; and were

useful only so far as they were observed, accompanied with a prospective faith in him whose mediatorial work they were designed to represent. The Apostle declares that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin ; the blood of all the animals slain upon Jewish altars could not atone for one transgression ; the crimson torrent flowed in vain, unless it reached the precious blood of Christ, the slaughtered Lamb of God. Their incense altars might smoke perpetually, and smoke in vain, unless that smoke ascended by faith to the place of the Redeemer's intercession at the right hand of God. But the most important of all the institutions of the ceremonial law was the office of the high priest. In him were typically combined all the most significant symbols of the plan of redemption. With the most devout and reverent solemnity, once every year he entered into the holiest place, bearing with him the blood of the appointed victims of sacrifice, which he there offered for the sins of the people ; thus showing forth and keeping up a perpetual symbolic representation of the entering in of the Great High Priest into the holy place, the tabernacle not made with hands, once for all, not with the blood of others, but with his own, by the shedding of which he has obtained eternal redemption for us.

But these priests, important as was their office, and significant their work, were not suffered to continue by reason of death ; they were subject to all the diseases and frailties of human nature, and to their removal from time by the hand of death. Hence, the line of the high priesthood was kept unbroken by a regular succession. The Apostle, in showing the true typical character of this part of the ceremonial law, and its direct reference to and representation of the mediatorial work of our Lord Jesus Christ, notices at the same time the successive departure of these priests from their office and work,

in obedience to the laws of mortality. "And they truly," says he, "were many priests; because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death." One after another vacated his office and left his work and was immediately followed by his successor. "But this man," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, "because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Heb. vii. 23-25. And with this inspired description of our unchangeable High Priest agree the words of our poet:

"He ever lives above,
For us to intercede;
His all redeeming love,
His precious blood to plead:
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace."

His precious blood now I may receive

His blood has been the atoning medium through which God in every age has bestowed upon the guilty penitent the forgiveness of sins. To his vicarious sacrifice, once offered for all, and to his prevailing intercession at the right hand of God, will every ransomed spirit be indebted for its deliverance from sin and misery, and for its introduction to the felicities of heaven. As the great High Priest of the human family, and the appointed Mediator between God and man, upon the commission of the first act of transgression, he took his station at the altar of the temple of sacrifice and incense, where he has continued uninterruptedly to perform all the duties connected with his character and office. Did the first guilty pair obtain pardon? It was the effect of his mediatorial agency. Did the patriarchs and prophets draw near to God and receive the communications of his grace? Their way of approach was by the mercy-seat, sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ. In this respect he is the same, and through every dispensation,

whether patriarchal, Jewish, or Christian, he is "the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by him." John xiv. 6. Was he the medium of access to the Father yesterday? he is the same to-day, and will be forever. And when from every age and every country the saints of the Most High shall meet around the dazzling throne, with a united voice they will ascribe to him the glory of their salvation. The saints of former days and those of latter times will there harmoniously unite in singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying to Jesus Christ, the great High Priest of all: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them will be heard saying with a loud voice, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Rev. v. 9, 10, 13.

III. He is the same in his Works of Mercy. Closely connected with and immediately flowing from his mediatorial character, is his power of performing in behalf of man his miracles of mercy. This part of his character has not so much immediate reference to the general redemption of mankind, which he has procured by his atoning sacrifice, as to the manner in which the benefits of this redemption are applied, in relieving the various forms of human woe. The introduction of sin into our world brought in its immediate train an innumerable multitude of evils; the sum of which was, the withdrawing from man the presence and favour of his Creator, that in which his chief happiness consisted. The cries of a

groaning creation entered into the Redeemer's ears, and the sufferings of man, excluded from the favour and intercourse of his Maker, excited his compassion, and led him to undertake the work he has so successfully accomplished. Passing over the various forms of human misery, his first aim in performing his works of mercy, was, the removal of the cause from which all our evils flowed. He became a man of sorrows, that he might thus relieve the sorrows of man; he was acquainted with grief, that he might deliver man from grief; he was despised and rejected of men, that man might be honoured and received by God. His yearning compassion for man drew him from his high and holy habitation to the very theatre of human suffering, not there to stand as an unmoved spectator of surrounding misery, but personally to feel its keenest pangs, and to drink its most bitter dregs; or as the affecting and descriptive language of Isaiah declares, "He became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Isaiah liii. 3. Having passed through the scene of his humiliation and suffering, and having subdued every foe to human happiness, like a triumphant conqueror he ascended from this vale of woe and warfare, and at his entry into his heavenly dwelling-place, the celestial hosts celebrated his victorious achievements, saying, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Psalms lxviii. And by thus fixing again the habitation of God amongst those who by their sins had forced him to depart, he has accomplished a work of mercy for man, the value of which a blissful eternity alone will be able to compute.

But as visible manifestations make a more powerful impression upon the mind than abstract contemplations possibly can, let us survey for a moment a few of the works

of mercy performed by our Lord Jesus Christ, during the short period of his ministerial life, whilst dwelling among men. How emphatic the declaration of the inspired apostle when he says, "Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil for God was with him." Acts x. 38. To do good was the object of his coming into the world. In this work every beating pulse of his loving heart urged him forward. Upon this his every thought was fixed and his every hour employed. How astonishing the miracles he performed to relieve the sufferings of the afflicted ! By his word the most inveterate diseases were cured ; at his command, devils relinquished their usurped possessions ; he speaks, and the blind receive their sight ; the lame walk, and lepers are cleansed. By his merciful and powerful interposition, he dries up the tears of a widowed mother, mourning the loss of an only son, the hope and comfort of her declining years ; he restores to the weeping sisters their beloved but departed brother ; he raises to life the only daughter of an anxious and loving parent. But his mercy extended not merely to the maimed, the diseased and lifeless bodies of men. Their *souls* lying in moral ruins and spiritual death, were the special objects of his tender regards. However great the benefits he conferred upon mankind in healing the maladies of the body, these benefits were but of temporary duration, and hence it was to the immortal soul that his highest acts of kindness were shown ; in pardoning the guilty, in cleansing the polluted soul from its moral defilements, and thus preparing it for the joys of the paradise of God. He exercised his own prerogative when he said to the believing penitent, "Be of good cheer ; thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee," and the soul, hitherto dead in trespasses and

sins, raised to spiritual life by the quickening power of his word, commenced the era of a new existence.

"He speaks, and list'ning to his voice,
New life the dead receive ;
The mournful broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe."

This is emphatically the work of Christ, and his very name declares the nature of the work he was appointed to perform. "And thou," said the angel, "shalt call his name JESUS : for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. i. 21. And in the performance of this work he is always the same. Did he say to the believing penitent yesterday, "Be of good cheer ; thy sins are forgiven thee ?" He says the same to-day. Did the spiritually dead, in former times, hear his voice and live ? He still speaks, and the same quickening power accompanies his word. What is every conversion of sinners from the error of their ways, but a living evidence that he continues the same in his works of mercy ? The same agency is always necessary to change and subdue the rebellious heart of man, and that agency is the power of Christ. It is true, we do not now see him performing his astonishing miracles in healing the diseases of the body, but we do see him performing his more astonishing miracles of grace upon the souls of men. And wherever we see a person turned from sin to holiness, and from the power of Satan unto God, there we have an evidence of indisputable and convincing authority that Jesus Christ continues the same in the performance of the works of mercy and compassion to the souls of men, in which he has been engaged from the foundation of the world. And he will, in this respect, as in every other, continue unchangeably the same through every successive revolution of time, until he shall have performed his last act of mercy towards the human family.

IV. He is the same in the Fullness of his Grace.

He is represented in the Scriptures as possessing an overflowing fullness, sufficient to supply the wants of all. "And out of his fullness," says John, "have all we received, and grace for grace." John i. 16. Again, he says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John i. 14. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." He is here presented to our view, as strengthening the weakness of the moral, and supplying the defects of the ceremonial law. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, (or by a sacrifice for sin,) condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Rom. viii. 3, 4. The law made no provision for the pardon of the guilty. With unmitigated sternness it spoke to all, "Do this and live;" while, at the same time, it poured its unmingled curses upon the head of every offender, declaring that man having once transgressed, could never afterwards be justified by the deeds of the law. It opened to the sinner no door of hope to escape the unyielding penalties of the law, except by such a constant and perfect obedience to its requirements, as through the weakness of his moral powers he was utterly unable to perform. It is true, the various rites and institutions of the ceremonial law, showed forth the possibility of obtaining pardon, by the presentation of a suffering sacrifice. These were, however, but mere shadows, and were possessed of virtue, or efficacy, only as pointing the offerer to the substance. Now, Jesus Christ is represented as standing in striking and

happy contrast to both of these laws. The moral law offered no pardon to the sinner ; but, " through this man is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins : and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts xiii. 38, 39. The institutions of the ceremonial law showed the possibility of a reconciliation to God, and the deliverance of man from the bondage of sin and death ; but the truth of this has been clearly shown by the triumphant entering in of Christ into the holy place, where, by the shedding of his own precious blood, he has obtained eternal redemption for us.

O ! if there is one part of the character of Christ upon which the sacred writers delight to dwell more than another, it is this, the exceeding riches of his grace. How glowing the language they use, when they attempt to describe the delightful plenitude of his grace ; and the very manner in which they express their thoughts, shows that they felt the powerful influence of the truth they attempted to declare. John says, " In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scriptures hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." John vii. 37, 38. And the apostle Paul breaks out in the exclamation, " Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Ephes. i. 3. It is sometimes called, " the riches of his glory ; and the exceeding riches of his grace." " In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For it hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell." Col. i. 19. And the very end for which he possessed this fullness of grace, even all the fulness of God, is that he may supply the wants of

needy man. And out of his fullness our wants may all be supplied. Is man guilty? He has power on earth to forgive sins. Is he unholy? His blood cleanses from all unrighteousness. Are his people tempted and tried? From him they receive grace to help in every time of need. He communicates his grace to all, and still his fullness is the same. He scatters his blessings liberally, and yet his hands are full. Through all the lapse of time the stores of his grace retain the same undiminished plenitude, and from them may all the wretched sons of want obtain rich and never-failing supplies.

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Phillipians, says, "But my God shall supply all your need, out of his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Phil. iv. 19. And unto the Ephesians he says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named; that he would grant unto you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with all might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephes. iii. 14-19. The plenitude of his grace is frequently represented by living fountains of water, of overflowing abundance, sufficient to quench the raging thirst of all: to which "the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Rev. xxii. 17.

The streams of his grace reach the whole creation, and so plenteous is the store he has provided, there is "enough

for all, enough for each, and enough for evermore." And in the ultimate progress of the streams proceeding from the fulness of Christ, the living fountain, to use the glowing and descriptive language of the prophet Isaiah, "In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes." Isa. xxxv. 6, 7. It is from the unchangeable and unfailing fullness of his grace, that he sustains and comforts his people, and causes their songs of rejoicing and praise to abound while in the house of their pilgrimage; and from the same unfailing source will be derived the endless felicities of the saints in the paradise of God.

V. But finally, He is the same in his Justice. Justice, in the sense here intended to be understood, is the universal rectitude of his nature, leading him to perform whatever his unerring wisdom has seen proper to determine, and directly refers to his faithfulness; first, in the fulfillment of his promises; and, secondly, in the execution of his threatenings.

"He is faithful that hath promised, who also will do it." Possessed of all the fullness of God, he can perform whatever he has promised. "Heaven and earth," says he, "shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away until all is fulfilled." His promise is firmer than the pillars of heaven, nor can the most powerfully opposing obstacles prevent their sure and certain fulfillment.

"Engraved as in eternal brass,
The mighty promise shines;
Nor can the powers of darkness raise
Those everlasting lines."

How sure is the fulfillment of prophecy! Ages intervening cannot shake the certainty of its accomplishment. How

exceeding great and precious are his promises to his people ! and with what unfailing certainty have all these promises been fulfilled. Who will charge him with a breach of promise ? The patriarchs and prophets, and his primitive persecuted followers ? Surely not. For they, "through faith and patience, inherit the promises." Heb. vi. 13. In this respect, especially, unto those who believe he is precious. Assured of his unchangeableness, they can unreservedly "commit the keeping of their souls unto him, as unto a faithful Creator." 1 Peter iv. 19. In all their trials and conflicts they hear him saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee." 2 Cor. xii. 9. "As thy days, so *shall* thy strength be." Deut. xxxiii. 25. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. When tempest tossed, and afflicted, how consoling is his language to his people : "Fear not ; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name : thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt ; neither shall the flames kindle upon thee." Isa. xliii. 1, 2. That he is of the same mind, and none can turn him, is a thought full of comfort ; but that he who is declared to be always the same, has hitherto fulfilled his every promise, is a truth, upon which his followers build their richest expectations. Has he said, that he that confesseth, and forsaketh, shall find mercy ? If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Has he said, that he that believeth shall be saved ? The believer receives the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. Has he promised to give unto those who are faithful unto death, a crown of life ? When he shall appear, attended by a glorious retinue of the heavenly hosts, then shall his faithful people receive from his own hand the unfading diadem.

But connected with the justice of his character is his faithfulness in the execution of his threatenings. And what period of his government does not afford sufficient proof, that as a king, he maintains the undiminished vigour of his authority, by inflicting the penalties of his law. From his justice, his devoted followers have everything *to hope*; but from the same source, the persevering transgressor has everything *to fear*. Has he said, that "He that believeth not, shall be damned?" The judgment of the sinner "lingereth not, and his damnation slumbereth not?" It is true, "he is long-suffering and slow to anger;" and his unwillingness that any should perish, leads him long to delay the execution of his threatenings. And while his judgments linger, his enemies sneeringly ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" But even while they are revelling in the midst of the pleasures of a delusive triumph, one universal shout is heard, "Behold he cometh with clouds!" His delays are not deliverances. The old world flourished one hundred and twenty years after heaven had cursed that guilty race; but at his bidding the embrasures of heaven were opened, and the fountains burst from their intrenchments to drown that impious generation. Sodom was a fertile valley long after the cry of its enormities had entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; but the fiery storm at last descended and destroyed them all. And the manner of procedure is always the same. He will punish all the workers of iniquity; but he waits until the appointed moment. In his movements there is neither passion, frenzy, nor haste. Like the lion in the forest, conscious of his strength, he comes upon his enemies with steady but dreadful steps. He will do just such things as he has done. If, therefore, he has hitherto punished his foes, the natural conclusion is, that he must and will reign until every enemy is destroyed. Yea, the wicked, as they take

their departure from the left hand of the Judge, and are driven away as shivering ghosts, will commence their eternal testimony to his faithfulness in the execution of his threatenings.

And now let me ask, in conclusion, "What think ye of Christ?" I know that to you who have built upon him all your hopes of present and future happiness, he is the fairest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely, and this consideration of the unchangeableness of his nature will but fix upon him more fully your unbounded confidence and love. How consoling to you the truth, that he is the same amidst all the fluctuations of the world around you; your Saviour and your all changes not. What though you see inscribed upon the heavens, "These shall pass away:" and upon the earth, "This shall be burned up." What though you see written upon man, "Thou shalt die:" from reading these mournful inscriptions of fading and decaying nature, you may return to the unchanging centre and foundation of your hopes, exclaiming with heightened joy, "And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest; they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Heb. i. 10-12. He is your only hope, and let him be the object of your supreme desire. He will soon change your countenance, and send you away rejoicing. Although it doth not now appear what you shall be, yet are you assured by his unfailing promise, that when he shall appear in all his grandeur and glory, to be admired by all his saints, then you shall be like him, and see him as he is. To you, also, poor broken-hearted penitent, he is the same. Do you wish to know what he was in days past? Why, when he was upon earth, his enemies brought the accu-

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sation against him, "This man receiveth sinners still." Though eighteen hundred years have rolled away since he appeared in the flesh, his tenderness and compassion are the same, and still his saving power is here. But it may be, that to some of you, he still appears as a root out of dry ground, without any attractive beauty or comeliness that you should desire him. Let me remind you, that if the sinful blindness of your hearts should prevent you from beholding his charms as the anointed Saviour, he will appear to you under another and more fearful aspect. He will be revealed to you in flaming fire, accompanied with the angels of his power, to take vengeance upon them that know not God. You may boast of his goodness and his mercy, but you do not remember that he has said, "The day of vengeance is in my heart." Isa. lxiii. 4. To you he will be faithful, faithful in forcing you away to those regions of darkness and despair, from the most distant thought of which you have so often recoiled with horror. Affixed to your doom will be the unutterable seal of eternity. If you remain impenitent, you will see him in that wrath which is terrible, and can never be appeased; that fearful wrath, the wrath of the Lamb. Alas! who shall deliver you when the Lion of the tribe of Judah shall arise to tear his enemies in pieces. From his wrath there is no escape.

SERMON IX.

THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE GOSPEL DAY.

AND WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE THE STABILITY OF THY
TIMES, AND STRENGTH OF SALVATION: THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS HIS
TREASURE.

ISAIAH xxxiii. 6.

THE glorious reign of the Messiah was the grand object which attracted every prophetic eye—to set forth the blessings of his universal spiritual dominion was the ultimate object of every prophetic revelation. To him give all the prophets witness, and they employ the most striking figures, and use the most glowing imagery and emphatic language, when they speak of the glory of his kingdom, and describe the happy condition of the people under his mild, peaceful and prosperous reign.

The text seems to have a primary reference to Hezekiah. It describes the happiness and security which the Jews enjoyed under his reign,—a reign which, by his wisdom and prudence, was signally blessed of God in promoting their welfare. But this prophecy, like most others of its kind, has a still more important application. It undoubtedly refers to the kingdom of the Messiah, and to the blessings resulting from the exercise

of the dominion of Christ over his redeemed people. "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment, and a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

That part of this extended prediction which is contained in the text, in its evident application to the times of the Messiah, declares that then there would be a diffusion of wisdom and knowledge so wide, so efficacious, and so salutary in its conservative influence, that by it society should be rendered stable and tranquil—that this wisdom and knowledge should produce salvation, or deliverance and preservation from temporal and spiritual evils and calamities. It declares further, that this salvation should be a strong one, furnishing the most powerful safeguards to human society, and the greatest security against the dangers to which mankind are liable from the malignant passions of fallen nature.

That this prophecy may also very properly be taken and applied as descriptive of the nature and results of the Messiah's reign, the history of the Gospel dispensation as furnishing only a partial fulfillment of this prediction, clearly attests. For we hold that the full import of this prophecy is yet to be accomplished. That wisdom and knowledge which are to produce the happy effects here described, have not yet to any great extent exerted their legitimate, and we may add, their certainly destined influence upon human society, in all its various combinations, and throughout its entire extent.

Wherever the pure truths of Christianity have spread, and their saving power been displayed, just so far have they been successful in producing the blessed results which the eye of prophecy saw following in their train. It is doubtlessly with reference to the extensive and glorious manner that the dark-

ness of our world was scattered by the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is called the "Light of the world." He came to testify of the Father, of whom it is said, "He is light, and in him is no darkness at all." "And he is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." As Christianity introduced religious or spiritual light, so did that become the radiating centre and source of every kind of excellent and useful knowledge. Divine truth must first illumine, invigorate and expand the mind, in order to prepare it for that exercise of its powers which realizes its highest and happiest results. Hence it is that the knowledge which the revealed truth of God communicates, imparts an energy and disposition to the mind of man, which place him in the most favourable state for the pursuit and attainment of all other kinds of knowledge. So far is Christianity from being opposed either in its spirit or tendency to the cultivation of those arts and sciences which mark the progress of society, that nearly if not all the discoveries in science, and the improvements in the arts, have been made by Christian nations, and by them only. Hence the opinion which is now so widely entertained that Christianity is not only favorable to but even promotes every species of useful knowledge, that only so far as the pursuit of knowledge is directed by the precepts of revelation, and employed in subordination to the supreme authority of the word of God, will its cultivation advance the best interests of society, and promote the real welfare of mankind. Where this great truth is disregarded or denied, the most disastrous results are sure to follow. The mere instruction of the people in worldly knowledge, to the neglect or exclusion of religious truth, so far from improving their condition, morally or politically, and producing that tranquility and national greatness of which the prophet speaks in the text, is in effect but rendering them

wise to do evil, and enlightening and strengthening their intellectual powers for a more pernicious use of their unhallowed and lawless propensities. Take for illustration the character and condition of France. With all their boasted refinement and proficiency in the sciences, and the arts of civilized life, their infidelity and utter disregard of the supreme authority of the God of the nations of the earth have entailed on them the most fearful consequences, not the least of which is the instability of their civil and political institutions, as exhibited in the fact, that within little more than a century, nine or ten revolutions have marked their history. Without moral and religious principle as the basis of stability, what otherwise could be expected?

While the masses that compose any nation are left in ignorance of Divine truth, they will ever be found to be the prey of violent factions, and the lawless indulgence of unhallowed passions; while on the other hand, Divine truth gives permanence and stability to every institution designed to promote the efficiency of human government, and through it the peace, happiness and prosperity of the people. Moreover, it is from this source alone that we can expect that pure and elevated morality which constitutes the true greatness of individuals, and improves the condition of nations. This is the doctrine taught in the text, the illustration of which will form the subject of the present discourse.

I. We take the term "wisdom" as here employed to signify especially that revelation of Divine truth which is contained in the inspired oracles; for it is there only that true wisdom can be found. The scriptural idea of wisdom consists in the knowledge of God and his will, the knowledge of our own obligations and duties; that knowledge which applies to man as an accountable creature destined to a future judgment, and

which teaches him the way in which a sinner may obtain that pardon, and peace, and holiness, which are necessary to prepare him to meet the God whom he has offended. The acquisition of this knowledge is represented to us in the Scriptures as of the highest importance, because it is the only kind which is suited to the nature, and supplies the wants of man. Wisdom, we are told by the author of the Proverbs, is the principal thing; we are, therefore, urged to get wisdom, and with all earnestness and intentness of purpose to search for it as for hidden treasure. This wisdom consists in that fear of the Lord which includes a knowledge of the Divine character, and a cheerful obedience to his just and holy laws. Thus Job inquires, "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Job xxviii. 12. After representing all nature as speaking and giving its united testimony, saying, "It is not with me," he says, "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding;" ver. 28. In this inspired definition of wisdom, we are taught to regard this wisdom as the only source of all true moral influence; no other knowledge possesses this peculiarity. This will appear quite obvious when we consider that the science of religion is the only one which teaches the knowledge of the true God, of his statutes and commandments, the only legitimate authority which imposes moral obligations and duties, and is capable of producing moral improvement. This will appear if we consider the nature of the truths which this wisdom imparts or reveals. It sets God before us in all his majesty as the great and terrible God, and in all his attributes of holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. It presents him as the omnipotent Creator of all things, and as having an absolute right to govern all his creatures. This wisdom reveals him as present in every place, and with an omniscient eye,

beholding both the evil and the good, taking knowledge of every thought as well as action as absolutely holy, and displaying his holiness in his law which forbids everything that is impure and wrong, and which enjoins the practice of all that is holy and right. It sets before us the justice of God as illustrated in the government of the world, visiting the iniquities of the wicked upon them, and showing favour to them who love him and keep his commandments. This wisdom teaches us also the plan by which Jehovah can save a guilty world, and through which he sets before mankind an open door of salvation. From this source also we learn the true character and condition of man as an accountable creature in a state of trial, which is to result in an eternity of bliss or woe, soon to appear in judgment to receive a reward according to the deeds of the present life. The knowledge which this wisdom imparts has a direct application to man as a moral being. It speaks to his conscience, addresses his hopes and fears, and enforces its requirements by the solemn sanctions of an eternity of rewards and punishments. No other kind of knowledge possesses this characteristic, or is capable of exerting a moral influence. The wisdom of God as displayed in the scheme of his moral government is that alone which is applicable to the moral faculties of man, and is sufficient to promote his highest welfare by fitting him for all the duties of the present life and for the enjoyments of his future state of existence.

2 But farther: the law of God as the only authoritative standard of right and wrong, furnishes us with a rule by which to judge of the moral quality of every act, and of every course of conduct; a rule, too, which is of universal extent, and simple and easy of application. In the word of God we have express directions for the regulation of our entire life, in thought,

word, and deed. These directions are so furnished as to be applicable to all the various circumstances in which man can be placed. The wisdom derived from revelation, then, is an authoritative system of morals addressed to the conscience of man, and designed for, and capable of training him for, the highest and holiest employment. Nor must we forget that this wisdom is accompanied by a divine power, or a living energy, which renders it all-sufficient for the accomplishment of its high and holy purposes. "The words that I speak unto you," says the Saviour, "they are spirit and they are life." John vi. 63. Without this living agency all means whatever which might be employed for improving the moral condition of mankind would be in vain. Even the law itself is weak through the flesh. It gives direction, but it cannot impart life. It may reprove, but it cannot reform. It condemns, but it does not renew. It is the Spirit that quickeneth; it is the Spirit that sanctifieth. This blessed mighty Spirit operates on the heart, and produces its effects in connection with revealed truth. The Gospel comes to us not in word only, but in the demonstration of the Spirit; with the holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

But our text speaks of knowledge as connected with wisdom in producing the happy results here described. This we suppose to mean all kinds of useful knowledge, such as is in accordance with the principles and design of revealed truth, and which may be regarded as immediately connected with the wisdom of the inspired word. For godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is. Christianity sanctions and encourages every art, and imparts spirit and energy to every enterprise which tends to lessen the miseries, and multiply the comforts of the present life. Hence the vast superiority in the civil and social condition of Chris-

tian nations over heathen, or even civilized nations. Hence also the fact, that when any tribe or nation receives Christianity, however barbarous before, the germs of civilization and refinement begin to exert their hitherto latent power. Till then man is ignorant of his true character. Made in the image and likeness of God, he now sees, that not only is he capable of spiritual enjoyments, but also of imitating the benevolence of Jehovah as displayed in the visible creation, by employing his intellectual and physical powers for the improvement of his race. This knowledge we may suppose to include intellectual cultivation, scientific pursuits, and all the arts connected with domestic and social happiness, national improvement, and temporal prosperity. These are the general results of the spread of the pure truths of the Gospel. And Christianity, in addition to the spiritual blessings which it confers by the encouragement it affords, and the direct influence it exerts, in the cultivation of every useful art, is thus multiplying and strengthening all the bonds that connect every social and political association, giving them permanence and stability, and enabling them to produce their happiest effects.

II. We now proceed to consider the effects of this wisdom and knowledge as the only source of tranquility and safety. This may refer either to individuals, communities, or nations, and is equally true in whatever respect it is applied.

1. The word of God is the great instrument by which the instruction of the ignorant, and the conversion of the wicked are to be effected, and in proportion to the extent this instrumentality is employed, these effects will be produced. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," (John,) is the prayer of Christ; thus teaching us that the truths of revelation are the only instrumentality possessing a moral or spiritual and

sanctifying influence, and from which such results as are attributed to it can be expected. The early religious instruction of the people therefore becomes an object of the very highest importance. But not only is a knowledge of divine truth necessary for the conversion, it is equally the only, effectual means to secure the stability, and promote the usefulness of those who have been brought to a saving knowledge of the truth. The Apostle Peter cautions such to beware lest they also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from their own steadfastness. As a certain safeguard against instability and error, he exhorts them "To grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Where the foundation is not laid in a knowledge of the doctrines and precepts of the word of God, there is but little ground to hope for either stability or usefulness in the cause of religion. This may be assigned as the reason why so many persons professing godliness become the sport of every wind that blows, and are led away from the simplicity of the Gospel by the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive. How many who have once bid fair for usefulness in the Church of God, have disappointed every hope, by neglecting to seek that religious and intellectual cultivation and improvement which is absolutely essential to spiritual prosperity? Nor need this be a subject of wonder. It is in accordance with the doctrine of the text. Wisdom and knowledge are to be the source of the stability of individuals, as well as of the times. Where these are not possessed, or earnestly and perseveringly sought, the result which they produce cannot rationally be expected. Christianity, as a system of light and knowledge, must be maintained upon its own principles, or be planted in its native soil, if we would realize its most abundant and richest fruits.

2. The same remarks apply with equal propriety to com-

munities and nations. Religious truth is the only effective instrumentality for producing and maintaining national tranquillity, and securing the performance of those institutions which are designed and calculated, under the control of the moral influence of Christianity, to promote the object for which they have been ordained. Merely secular education cannot accomplish this. Civil government is inefficient without the moral power of the Gospel. The evils of anarchy are kept at bay only by the might of the tyrant, or the ignorance and impotence of the slave, where the strength of a nation's salvation is not deeply laid, in the wide diffusion, and controlling and subduing influence of moral and religious principles.

Christianity secures the obedience of the subject to the lawful authority, not from fear of punishment, but for conscience' sake, and from a supreme regard to the higher authority, and the holy purposes for which that authority has been delegated.

The bulwark of a national security against the evils of internal strife and foreign aggression lies not in the might of its armies, but in the all-pervading power of that Gospel which proclaims peace on earth and good-will amongst men, and which teaches every man to see in his fellow man a friend and a brother.

From these considerations we may deduce a few practical inferences and reflections.

The first is, we have placed within our reach the means for the accomplishment of the greatest possible good, and that, too, to the widest extent and permanent duration.

In the excitement of the discussion of the comparative merits of the different systems, political or otherwise of the present day, we hear much of the power of the press, and of the superior excellence of this or that political theory, upon which the hope of the country depends. We admit the power of the press ;

but, at the same time, we cannot forget it is a power for good or evil ; for a blessing or a curse, just in proportion as it accords with the genius, and is controlled by the spirit and precepts of our holy Christianity. Nor is it ever so powerful, or so properly employed for the accomplishment of its highest ends, as when in the spirit of a Paul it reasons upon "righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come," and proclaims the wrath of God against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, teaching them, that "denying" themselves of all "ungodliness and worldly lusts," they are to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

So far from giving any shadow of countenance to the idea that the hope of our country and the world depends upon the ascendancy of this or that political theory, we hesitate not to avow our skepticism in the efficiency of any and every mere political system, which does not lay a firm hold of the great principles of Christianity as the sheet-anchor of its hopes of success. Wisdom and knowledge ; the wisdom of God in the mystery of the Gospel, and the knowledge of its saving power, are to be the stability of our times, and the strength of our salvation. And those who, in humble dependence upon Almighty God, are labouring, whether in the domestic circle, in the Sabbath school, by the dissemination of the word of God, the circulation of tracts, or in the pulpit, to extend the kingdom of Christ, are doing more for the welfare of mankind than all the boasted power of the press, or the imposing array of political combinations and conventions. Nor can we but think that Christians very much mistake their calling when they expose themselves to the ruinous influence of a party spirit in securing the elevation of ungodly men to office and authority, no matter what may be the excellence of the political theory he may profess to entertain. Without the influence of a moral

and religious character he will be a curse, in some way or other, rather than a blessing. The voice of inspiration has declared it, and the universal experience of mankind illustrates the fearful truth of the declaration, that, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." Prov. xxix. 2.

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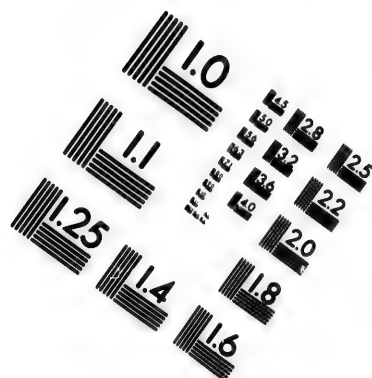
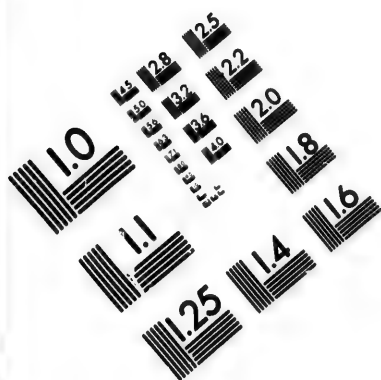
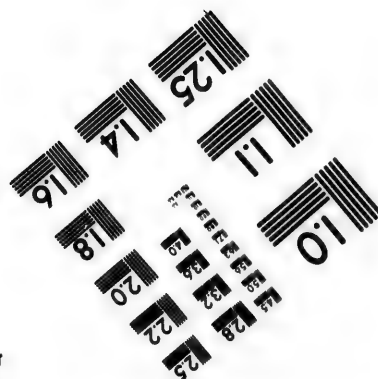
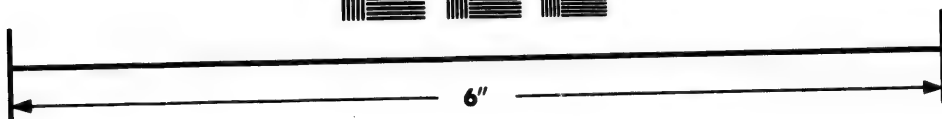
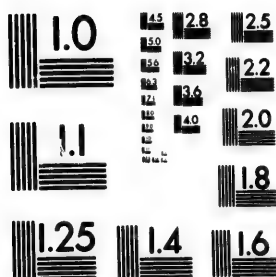


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SERMON X.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE FOUND.

AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO TREASURE HID IN A FIELD; THE WHICH WHEN A MAN HATH FOUND, HE HIDETH, AND FOR JOY THEREOF GOTH AND SELLETH ALL THAT HE HATH, AND BUYETH THAT FIELD,

MATTHEW xiii. 44.

How simple and yet how profound the truths which the Great Teacher taught the people by parables! Instead of drawing his illustrations from remote objects, or the principles of some abstruse science, the common and well known incidents of every day life were employed. While this mode of instruction was admirably adapted to place the Divine truths of the Gospel within reach of the lowest in the scale of intelligence, the very simplicity and commonness of the illustrations employed confounded and perplexed those who were wise in their own conceit, and while hearing they understood not, and seeing they perceived not the deeply interesting and important spiritual truths which these parables were designed to reveal. The parable of the text is a beautiful and impressive illustration of the wisdom of this Divine method of teaching mankind *in what*, and *how*, their true good may be secured.

The peculiar force and fitness of the incident here employed will be better understood by a knowledge of the times and place to which it refers.

We are, perhaps, sometimes surprised when we read of the abundance of gold and silver which was possessed in ancient times, and we wonder what has become of those vast treasures. The disappearance of much of these precious treasures of ancient times is accounted for by the accident to which the man in this parable owed his good fortune. In those days and countries there were but few branches of trade in which men could engage. There were no banks in which they could deposit their gold, and as capitalists had not then learned the art of investing their money in mortgages at from fifteen to forty per cent interest, with the fair prospect of a fortunate foreclosure, just before the last instalment was paid, concealment of their treasure offered the best if not the only security. Hence it was a common practice, while reserving a portion of their money for present use, to bury large quantities of gold and silver, or other precious treasures, and it often happened that by sudden death the secret of their treasure was buried with them. Besides this, in ancient times wars were frequent, and when a country was suddenly invaded, the only hope of the inhabitants to preserve their treasures was to hide them in the earth. Falling in battle, or being driven from their homes, they never returned to recover their wealth, and thus the earth became a bank, in which, during a course of ages, was accumulated a vast amount of hidden and unclaimed deposits. Illustrations of this ancient custom are sometimes found in modern times and countries, when the spade or the plough breaks some waste moorland, or the hand that tears down some old castle, are now and then bringing to light old coins, or ornaments of gold and silver. Since the lands of the Bible

were rich in their precious treasures, such an occurrence as that related in this parable was not merely possible, but likely to be a very common event. Hence the Saviour relates it with the natural simplicity and grace with which a tale of real life is always invested. A peasant is engaged in preparing the field for the seed. It is one which perhaps has lain for centuries untilled, or it may have been exhausted by long continued use, and in order to enrich the soil he sends the plough-share deep into the earth. With no anxious thought he thus pursues his work, when suddenly the ring of metal salutes his ears. He turns and beholds the earth turned yellow with gold, or sparkling with precious jewels. With a prudent forethought he restores the ground to its former appearance, and concealing the joy of his discovery under an air of indifference, he seeks the owner of the field and negotiates a purchase. The price requires all his worldly goods; he sells his house, his furniture, and even the beds from his sleeping children, and leaves his family without a home or shelter. His friends are amazed and pity him as one suddenly bereft of reason. But he knows what he is about. Regardless both of the advice and direction of his friends, and perhaps the entreaties of his family, from whom he has as yet kept the secret of his discovery, he secures the field at a price which they regard as his ruin. But soon their surprise at his folly is changed into envy at his success. Possessed of an ample fortune, he exchanges the obscure, humble toiling life, for the respect and ease, the comforts and luxuries which all desire, but which only the few obtain. Such is the nature of the incident which forms the subject of this parable.

The kingdom of heaven, the righteousness, peace, and joy which are the believer's inheritance, are here represented by a treasure. A treasure! what magic is in that word, especially

when it represents money, which is commonly supposed to possess the power of securing every earthly good. In a world that looks down upon poverty with contempt, and regards honest humble toil as fit only for the lowest rank, and where that respect is paid to wealth which is due only to moral worth; as moderate fortune will secure its possessor from neglect, and if accounted rich, in the common sense of that term, he is welcomed to the society of the great and the noble. But what are the privileges and honours which worldly wealth confers, when compared with those which the treasures of the Gospel secure to those who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom? Lifting the poor from the dust, and the needy from the dunghill, it sets them amongst the princes of God's people. "A christian is the highest style of man." He is introduced to the "society of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born," whose names are registered in heaven's own record of nobility, and compared with whom, in true worth or real dignity, and lofty and enduring fame, earth's highest titles are but empty names, and kings and princes are but worms of the dust.

Give to worldly treasures their highest value, and they can give to us at best but a temporary and unsatisfying enjoyment. They may provide for us a splendid mansion, the richest luxuries, and the most costly decorations; but alas! they cannot shield us from the foreboding that all this must soon be exchanged for the shroud, the coffin and the narrow house, and that the pampered body will only have been richer food for the devouring worms. But possessed of the treasures of the kingdom of heaven, I feast upon "marrow and fat things, and wine on the lees well refined;" I will dwell under the shadow of the Almighty; angels are my ministering spirits; my garments are the robes of righteousness, and my body, transformed

to the likeness of its glorified and immortal pattern, will find its final home in the palace of the Eternal King.

The bankrupt who succeeds to a fortune is placed in circumstances to repair the evils which his worldly reverses may have inflicted upon himself or others. Is there a stain upon his honour? he wipes it out, or if he has maintained his integrity even in the depths of adversity, still he can now relieve himself of a burden that presses heavily upon the conscience of an honest man. When the last farthing of his debts is paid, he can look every man in the face, and is accounted a happy and honourable man. But what are benefits like these, when compared to those which the treasures of the kingdom confer? which pay debts which figures cannot express, and satisfy demands which no earthly price can meet. With the infinite merits of the one great and perfect sacrifice, I satisfy Divine Justice, and obtain a full acquittal in the High Court of Heaven. Lifting up my head before men and angels, in presence of the Eternal throne, being freed from the law of sin and death, and delivered from the power of the devil, I triumphantly exclaim, "Who is he that condemneth? It is God that justifieth!"

We speak sometimes of the treasures we possess in our friends, our worldly associations, our health, or our good name; but how soon may all these disappear, like the riches that fly away! Richer far is he who is assured of a place in the heart of that Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, whose friendship no adversity can shake, and who walks with us even through the valley of the shadow of death. How much more endearing and enduring is the fellowship of the saints, the ties of grace which even death cannot dissolve, the union of kindred spirits whose bond is a life that never dies, a peace that

find troubles may disturb, but cannot destroy, and which remains unmoved like the rock in the midst of the angry surges of the ocean.

The unspeakable value of the treasure represented by the pardon, peace and joy of the Gospel, led believers of ancient days to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and lose life itself rather than part with the heavenly inheritance. The same estimate is still put upon this treasure by all whose spiritual perceptions enable them to compute its real value. Let this be tested by a simple illustration. In the city of London is a building which in one sense represents the wealth of nations, and whose directors hold the fate of crowns and kingdoms at their disposal. Entering this building by its guarded doors, you descend by strongly protected passages to a room divided into various compartments, and whose walls are formed of massive iron. You are now in the strong room of the Bank of England, where gold and silver are piled "heaps upon heaps." Take from his loom the poor pale-faced but pious weaver, whose shuttle flies from early morn till far into the night; or bring up from the dark and unhealthy mine the poor but pious pitman, whose dusty labours are attended with fearful perils, amidst an explosive and poisonous atmosphere. Placing either of these in the presence of this glittering treasure, offer him the whole upon condition that he part with the treasures of the kingdom, the blessedness of which he realizes in his heart. He will spurn the enchanting bribe, and blessing God as he returns to his toil and humble house, he will say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." With the blood-bought treasure I possess, I have what cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof; the gold and the crystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of pure gold. No mention shall be

made of coral or of pearls, for the price of it is above rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. Nor would such a test be a mere imaginary illustration. It has been proved in ten thousand instances in the experience of faithful believers who have maintained their integrity, and held their heavenly treasure with a grasp that neither prosperity nor adversity, the smiles nor the frowns of the world, nor even death itself, in its most appalling forms, could weaken or unloose.

Though some who profess to have found this treasure, and value it above every other possession, may have bartered it for earth's perishing portion, or show by the tenacity with which they hold or hoard up their worldly treasures, how low is the value they set upon the things of God and salvation; yet is this treasure none the less real, valuable, and desirable than is intended to be represented by the price at which it was secured by the man in this parable.

The blessings of the Gospel are here represented by a hidden treasure. How fitly does this parable portray the scenes of real life in which though the richest treasure, nay, all of real good, lies just beneath our feet and within our reach, yet ignorant of its presence we are restless with unsatisfied desires, we imagine that only sorrows spring out of the ground, and we die at last in all the wretchedness of absolute want!

Long before the priceless riches of the distant colony of Australia were discovered, emigrants had left the shores of England to try their fortunes in that land. Many of these early adventurers earned only a bare subsistence. Far removed from the society of their friends, with no hope of improving their condition, they pined and drooped like flowers transplanted in an uncongenial soil. Yet all this time mines of wealth lay hid beneath their feet. The roots of the tree

under which the shepherd reclined, while tending his flocks and meditating upon the scenes and friends of former days, covered rocks of gold, and the very bed of the stream from which he quenched his thirst, was formed of those precious sands from which thousands afterwards drew splendid fortunes. Yet the first exiles to that country lived poor in the midst of riches, walking daily above treasures that might have made them independent of labour, and sunk at last, exhausted by care and toil, into an early and lonely grave. Such was the sad fate of many a one, with gold enough, perhaps, in the stones that formed his rude hearth, or in the rock against which his log hut stood, to provide him with all the comforts a splendid fortune affords. The case of the poor adventurer in that or other lands, with his tent pitched upon a gold-field, but ignorant of the treasure within his reach, is a fitting illustration of the condition of thousands of our race, and in the midst of the light and privileges of Christianity. With the treasures of the kingdom of Heaven within their reach, they have them not. They are wretched, and poor, and miserable, and in want of all things. The riches of grace are hid from them. The god of this world has so blinded them, that they see not the glorious things of the kingdom, which are discerned only by a spiritual perception. Were God to make this hidden treasure as plain to those men as the plough-share did to the peasant's wondering eyes, they would leave the house of God richer and happier than he. Yes, within the lids of the poor man's Bible is a greater treasure of true peace, happiness and honour, than all the wealth of Australia's gold mines can confer. What can that do for man in comparison with the rewards which the treasures of grace bestow? All the gold of Australia could not purchase the pardon of one of the thousands of criminals, which a country weary of their crimes had banished

to those distant and desolate shores. But in possession of the hidden treasure of the kingdom, I have a price which satisfies justice more inexorable and exacting than human laws; I have an atonement for guilt, the penalty of which appals the most hardened conscience, and causes the stoutest heart to quail. With this treasure I enjoy the blessed sense of a pardon which no earthly price could purchase, and look forward with the joyous assurance that it will present me faultless before the Eternal throne with exceeding joy.

Again: the unspeakable value of the treasures of Divine grace, as realized in the character and dignity with which the possessor is invested; and how incomparably superior in this view do they appear to any or every earthly inheritance! The wealth of the most successful adventurer cannot conceal the meanness of his birth, give polish to his manners, and raise him from his lowly rank, and enroll his name with those of an ancient and jealous nobility. It alters the condition, but not necessarily the character of the man. And how often is the possession of wealth associated with ignorance, the most vulgar manners, and sordid passions, illustrating the figure of the wise man in Proverbs xi. 23, of a "jewel of gold in a swine's snout." But the light and sanctifying power of the Gospel received into the heart by faith, alter both the character and condition of the man, making the rude gentle, the vulgar refined, the impure holy, the selfish generous and benevolent, elevating them to the rank of a true nobility, and working a more marvellous transformation than if the exiled felon were to become a prince, or the poor despised pilfering boy of the street were to have the star of honour placed upon his manly breast, and stand in the brilliant circle that surrounds a throne. In the precious blood-bought treasure of Divine grace, sin's darkest stains may be effaced, the foulest heart purified—there

is a peace to calm life's fiercest storms, a light to illumine and cheer the darkest days of earth, and even the valley of the shadow of death. It imparts a courage which all the assaults of the powers of darkness cannot shake, and a hope which blooms with immortality amidst the taking down of the earthly tabernacle, the world on fire, and the solemn scenes of the rising dead and a sitting judgment.

The discovery of this hidden treasure appears to have been purely accidental. The man was apparently pursuing his daily labour, without any thought or anxiety in regard to the good fortune that lay in his path. In the case of the man who was seeking goodly pearls, there had been a diligent and persevering search for the desired object; but here the order seems to have been entirely reversed, and without any of the prudent foresight and pains-taking effort by which riches are generally accumulated, he comes at once and unexpectedly into the possession of a fortune.

The parable may, doubtlessly, be employed to illustrate the Sovereignty of Jehovah, in the means he employs to discover to mankind the hidden riches of Divine grace. In one case, there may be the gradual light and the long and restless disquietude of a burdened and seeking soul, while in another, conviction for sin and the joyous assurance of pardon may be the work of a day or an hour, and under circumstances which the sinner may have least anticipated. How often is it that the careless repair to the house of God with no thought of God or desire to obtain spiritual good, and yet the curiosity or habit which led them there has resulted in their salvation. There are instances in which even the wrath of man and the wickedness of the ungodly have been made the occasion of their conversion. But our concern now is not so much with the exact manner in which God chooses to make known to man the things that belong to his peace, as to consider the conduct

of the man in this parable, when the hidden treasure was discovered to his wondering eyes. His plan was at once formed, and the decision so prompt, was followed by effort equally earnest and determined, until the possession of his treasure was secured. He lost no time, and counted no sacrifice too great to make the discovered treasure his own. And yet how different is the conduct of mankind in regard to the incomparably more valuable treasures of salvation. With the Word of Truth, the light of the Divine Spirit, and the means of grace, to make known to them the riches of Divine grace, and their own admission and professed belief that the salvation of the soul is the most important object that can engage an immortal mind, they either delay till an uncertain future, or refuse to pay the price required to secure the precious treasure. Some real or imaginary sacrifice is too great, some associations which cannot be broken up, or some companions cannot be forsaken ; or the pleasureable sin of the ball-room stands in the way of securing the discovered good. But by the example of the man in this parable, the Saviour teaches that he who will not secure the treasures of grace at any price, shall not enter into the kingdom. No pains must be spared, no means neglected, no Sabbath and sanctuary privileges unimproved, nor any duty left unperformed, if we would make sure our interest in Christ and gain a meetness for the heavenly inheritance.

The example of the man in keeping the secret of his discovery to himself, is not set forth for imitation by him who finds the heavenly treasure. In no other sense does the Christian hide his treasure than by keeping himself unspotted from the world, in guarding his peace of mind from being disturbed by temptation, and his purity from being stained by sin. In all other respects, those who find the treasures of the Gospel seek to make them known to all. There is not only no motive

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for secrecy, but an involuntary impulse to be the herald of the discovery to the poor and perishing around them. In the freeness and plenitude of the grace by which they have been enriched and made heirs of the kingdom, they are assured that there is enough for all and evermore, and their language is—

" O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me,
Would all mankind embrace."

" Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend money for that *that which* is not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which* is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Isaiah lv. 1, 2.

None ever found this treasure who did not wish others might obtain the same, and who do not in their sphere endeavour to make known their discovery, and invite others to seek its possession, and who do not realize that in the multiplying numbers of those who find it, their own joys are increased. Unlike the worldly riches, this heavenly treasure excites neither contempt for the poor, nor envy at the success of those who are rising to take rank with the rich and the great. Such are often the effects which follow the possession of the treasures of gold and silver. But he possesses most of the treasures of the Gospel, realizes the highest and holiest joy at the tidings of others finding the pardon and peace of salvation.

Now, it is said that this man parted with all that he had, in order to secure the field which contained his discovered treasure, and yet it is not intimated that the price he paid bore any comparison to the value of what he obtained in the exchange. And certainly this parable gives no countenance to the notion

that when the drunkard parts with his cups, the miser with his sordid love of gold, the licentious man with his lust, the gay with their vanities, and the wretched with their misery, that thereby they either purchase salvation, or make a sacrifice in order to secure the heavenly treasure. They only part with that which, to say the least, is no profit, and receive for the exchange an unspeakable and eternal gain.

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SERMON XI.

LIFE AND IMMORTALITY.

NEITHER CAN THEY DIE ANY MORE.

LUKE XX. 36.

Jesus Christ has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. It required no revelation from heaven to assure us that death is the common lot of all the human family. The history of our world proves this fact. "Our fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?" Zech. i. 5. But though the voice of nature and experience teach us the mortality of man, yet, in the whole volume of Nature, there is nothing to assure us that the intelligent mind will survive the ruins of the material fabric which it now inhabits; or in other words, that the soul is immortal. There are, it is true, facts connected with the operations of the material universe, and especially are these facts strongly developed by the progressive history of man's earthly existence, which may be employed as illustrations of the immortality of the soul, when that doctrine has been once revealed; but the only absolute proof is found in the inspired writings, and nowhere else. But if nature furnishes us with no evidence that

the soul will retain its consciousness in a future state of existence, much less can we infer from the works of creation what our probable condition will be in another world, even admitting the doctrine of our spiritual immortality to be proved from some other source. Some of the heathen sages had some faint conceptions of a future state of existence; but even Socrates, who was, perhaps, the wisest among them, declared, just before his death, that everything respecting a future state was to him a matter of doubt and uncertainty.

But where reason, or the light of nature fails, the sun of revelation sheds its heavenly beams upon our path, and aided by its light, we may penetrate the veil which hides from our natural vision the scenes of the invisible world, and behold to some extent the nature of our future home. The text declares one peculiarity respecting it; viz., the absence of death, and consequently of those changes which death produces. The society there will never be invaded or broken up by death.

If we understand these words to have been spoken in reference to heaven, as they undoubtedly were, they present us with one of the most delightful circumstances connected with the happy abode of the saints; and had nothing been said of it more than this, it would be sufficient to render a residence there exceedingly desirable. Could there be found upon our earth a region where death could not come, how soon would that region be sought for our future perpetual abode. We regard death as our most formidable antagonist, from whose grasp we are most anxious to escape; and well we may, when we consider what it implies, or the changes it effects in our condition.

1. It terminates our worldly pursuits and employments. The brief and uncertain period of our earthly existence is all that we have for worldly cares and pursuits. In whatever

employment we may engage, however important the relations we may sustain, yet we are assured we can continue here but for a little. In the midst of our most extensive plans, and while engaged in the most laudable and useful enterprises, we are liable to be suddenly arrested and removed from the scene of our employments, from all connection with the transactions which may have absorbed all our thoughts and engaged our most vigorous and unwearied energies. We need not, therefore, form very extensive plans, or engage in any enterprises which require a long time to complete, for we may not live to accomplish them. We may be cut down in the midst of our plans, on the very threshold of business. We commence the pursuit of knowledge, but ere we have read even the first page of the book of nature, or of revelation, the darkness of death may obscure our vision and terminate our progress.

But in heaven it will not be so, nor will our employments ever be interrupted by death. How delightful, indeed, is this consideration to those who are now engaged in the service of their Divine Redeemer. Here they are often called away from their delightful employments to attend to their worldly cares, and their minds distracted by the things of this life. But in heaven their holy employments will be perpetual. Their spirits will never tire; disease will never enfeeble their powers, nor disable them for their duties. They may form plans for employing their ransomed powers as boundless as eternity, for all eternity is before them; no changes in their place of abode, or the circumstances of their existence will ever arrest their progress or put an end to their pursuits. Their acts of devotion will be unceasing. Their songs of praise will be one perpetual strain.

II. Death will deprive us of our earthly possessions.

However extensive and valuable our earthly possessions may

be, we must leave them at the grave. We brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out. However firm the hold we now have of our worldly treasures, death will palsy the hand and force us to relinquish our grasp. The miser may worship his gold and silver, and the worldling may boast, like the fool in the Gospel, that he has much goods laid up for many years; but, as secure as they may suppose themselves to be in the possession of their worldly treasures, one certain event will deprive them of all forever. Not only will death separate us from our possessions, but the certainty of this greatly lessens their value even while we retain them.

The man of business amasses wealth, but how gloomy the apprehension that he must leave it all, to whom he cannot tell! We build houses and adorn them, but as we gaze upon them the sad reflection comes rushing over us, that we must shortly inhabit them no more: nor can all the riches of earth purchase one moments delay! The rich man in his splendid mansion, as well as the beggar in his rags, must obey the final summons. For, "*Pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas, Regumque turres.*" Hor. Car. iv., Lib. 1.

Death, moreover, will separate the soul and the body, and deprive us of that which we prize so highly, and which, perhaps, has absorbed all our thoughts. He will seize our bodies and keep them for a time as his possession. But how different will it be in heaven. Our possessions there will be secured to us forever. Neither doth moth nor rust corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Death can never invade the regions of the blessed, nor enter those heavenly mansions which the Saviour is preparing for his people. When once they enter and take possession, it is to go no more out forever. Their inheritance is one that is incorruptible; the place of their abode, are everlasting habitations; their treasures are as dura-

ble as the days of heaven ; their crowns are crowns of life. Neither death, adversity, nor violence can ever affect them, or render their possessions insecure. Here, we are always liable to disastrous occurrences, to worldly losses, disease and death. In the heavenly world there will be the absence of all these evils.

" No chilling winds, or poisonous breath,
Shall reach that healthful shore ;
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more."

Our bodies, too, will be immortal ; no more to become the prey of the king of terrors and the captives of the grave. For this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption ; and then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written,—“ Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Cor. xv. 4.

How delightful and glorious will be the contrast between our precarious existence here, and that of the glorified spirits in heaven. Sad experience has made us familiar with the evils of our present condition, but we can form only a very faint conception of the vast rewards that await the faithful when they reach their final home.

III. Death will destroy our earthly pleasures.

The very thought of death, to the votary of pleasure, is sufficient to cast a dismal shade over his brightest worldly prospects. Go to the man of wealth in his splendid mansion, living in the enjoyment of all the pleasures that earth can afford, and remind him of the certainty of death, and how unwelcome the admonition. The idea of dying is like the bitterness of wormwood in his cup of nectar : it poisons all his pleasures. How sad to think of pleasure's short duration ! What gloomy and melancholy feelings are associated with the anticipation of the hour of our dissolution. Hence it is that we

are disposed to put far away the evil day, and to banish as far as possible from our thoughts the day of our death.

Not only is the expectation of death so unpleasant as greatly to lessen our pleasures while we enjoy them, but when that event shall take place and separate us from the objects which are now the source of our delights, then will our worldly pleasures end and cease forever. But the pleasures of heaven will be eternal: without interruption or end. "God shall wipe away tears from off all faces; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev. xxi. 4. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion," &c. Isaiah xxxv. 10. Disease cannot enter there and unfit us for the pleasures of heaven; time cannot impair them, nor death destroy them. There will be immortal youth, perpetual summer, and unfading joys. Perhaps from no other source do we derive greater pleasures here than from the society of affectionate friends. Hence we form circles of acquaintance, and are happy for a time, till death enters and breaks up our association. Where are those beloved friends and associates whose society we once enjoyed, and thereby beguiled the tediousness of life's cares and sorrows? Death has come and claimed them as the subjects of his absolute and universal dominion. We ask for our parents to whom we once looked up for protection and support; for our brothers and sisters, the loving companions of our life's morning dawn, but nought but death's echo replies,— "They are gone." We form the most intimate and pleasing associations, with the certainty that death will soon dissolve the bond of our connection; and how soon, too, does he come to perform his work. How many circles has he already broken up, and how many more will he enter! how much happiness does he destroy! what misery

follows in his resistless march ! Here he reigns an absolute monarch over every child of man ; and how many sighs and bitter tears daily attest the universality and the cruelty of his reign. Behold him invading the family circle, and with his resistless iron grasp seizing the kind parent or the blooming child ; and then witness, in the tears and anguish of the surviving friends, how death destroys our worldly pleasures. But in heaven there will be no death, and, consequently, no separation. There friends meet to enjoy each other's society forever, free from the disquieting apprehensions of a separation. There the families of the faithful will be re-united, to be torn asunder no more by the ruthless hand of death. Ask the Christian mourner, while his heart is yet bleeding from the fresh wounds which death has inflicted, if the absence of death with all its sad effects does not render his heavenly home more desirable ?

IV. But, lastly, Death removes us to an untried and changeless state of existence.

Notwithstanding the evils we suffer here, and the sorrows which attend on every step, we are fond of our present home, and the thought of exchanging it for one with which we are unacquainted, is by no means agreeable to us. In the present life, too, our circumstances are perpetually changing, and if our condition at any time is not such as we desire, hope enables us to look forward to a period when some happy change will take place, relieve us from our sorrows, and put us in possession of the good we desire. But in the eternal world there will be no change. In heaven, death can never enter to remove its happy inhabitants, for they shall be ever with the Lord. They will not be carried from joy to sorrow, from prosperity to adversity : all will be joy and peace, without any change or mixture of sorrow.

How much, then, is implied in this brief description of heaven, and how happy and glorious the home of the saints. If, however, in eternity there will be no death, how awful, indeed, will be the state of the sinner when banished from the presence of God. We sometimes wish for death to relieve us, as we suppose, from our sufferings. But though the lost in hell may desire to die, yet death will flee from them; and an eternity of changeless, deathless, hopeless agony will be their awful portion. Our own conduct will decide the question, whether we are to spend a deathless eternity in the enjoyment of the unfading and uninterrupted pleasures of heaven, or amidst the rayless gloom and the unalterable miseries of hell. How important, then, is the present life, which is to determine such momentous destinies. The Lord help us wisely to improve it.

SERMON XII.

THE FIRM FOUNDATION.

THEREFORE THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD, BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION
FOR A FOUNDATION A STONE, A TRIED STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER-STONE,
A SURE FOUNDATION: HE THAT BELIEVETH SHALL NOT MAKE HASTE.
ISAIAH xxviii. 16.

THE Lord, by the prophet Jeremiah, (2-13,) says, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." And the evils of which the Lord here complains were not confined to the people of Israel; but have been fearfully prevalent in every age, and amongst all the nations of the earth. That it is the natural disposition of every descendant of the fallen pair to forsake the living God, none will pretend to deny; and it is equally an indisputable fact, that it is the prevailing disposition of fallen men to rest their expectations of present and future happiness upon any other, however slender and uncertain, than upon the proper and only sure foundation. Nor need we scarcely refer, in proof of this, to the various schemes, devised by human, and we might add, by diabolical ingenuity, for the purpose of quieting the clamorous accusations of a

guilty conscience; of satisfying the aspirations of the immortal spirit of man, after a desired good which he does not naturally possess; of protecting him against present evils, and giving him a consoling hope of future safety and bliss; and for the purpose of shielding him against the disquietude and alarms which the unenlightened contemplation of death creates, followed as it will be by the solemn realities of judgment, and a changeless eternity. To accomplish these objects, painful penances, costly ablutions, long and wearisome pilgrimages, protracted privations, and the infliction of severe bodily tortures have been devised. But of all these things, the inventions of a depraved and perverted ingenuity, it may be said that they are but broken cisterns, refuges of lies, false dependencies, which can afford no consolation or sure support to the immortal spirit, when most it will need some sure foundation upon which to rear its hopes. To all the deluded victims of these superstitious errors and delusive hopes, who may be represented as saying in the language of the verse preceding the text, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:" to all those who have trusted in any false hope or refuge, the Lord speaks in the words of the text, and calls their attention to the only sure foundation in opposition to the refuges of lies in which they had trusted: as if he had said, since therefore, the refuge to which you have fled is not safe; since it cannot afford you that support and protection which you need to shield you from the overflowing scourge of divine wrath; and because I have no pleasure in the destruction of any, "Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."

There is no doubt whatever that these words have reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to him alone. And there is no hazard of giving a false interpretation of this prophecy of Isaiah in applying it to the Saviour of the world, since the Apostle Peter, under the unerring influence of the Divine Spirit quotes it as descriptive of him alone. "To whom coming," says he, "as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as spiritual stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," wherefore, also, it is contained in the Scripture, referring undoubtedly to this passage, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Peter ii. 4-6.

Taking these words then in their evangelical sense, as applying to the illustrious Personage whose advent we are met to commemorate,* they present him to our view under the most cheering aspects, and the contemplation of his character, as it is here portrayed in the figurative language of the text, cannot fail of affording both pleasure and profit to every sincere penitent, and every faithful Christian.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone." We need scarcely remark that by Zion we are doubtless to understand the Church of God, the universal Church as it has existed under every dispensation, whether patriarchal, Jewish, or Christian. Of this Church Zion was a very significant type. It was at Zion or Jerusalem that the temple was situated, which contained all those significant symbols through the medium of which the people learned the plan of redeeming grace, and held intercourse with Heaven.

* Preached on Christmas Day.

Out of Zion as the chosen and sacred repository of Divine truth, the law was to go forth. There the Lord declared he would dwell in a peculiar manner; meet with his faithful people; and bestow upon them those spiritual blessings necessary to qualify them for heaven; and as the place where all the faithful people of God resorted, it was a visible and descriptive emblem of the Church of God, the spiritual building in which all true believers dwell. The Church is called by the Apostle Peter a spiritual house, and the members of the church are represented as being the spiritual stones of which it is built. Of this house, or the Church of God, the dwelling place of all true believers, Jesus Christ is said by the text to be the foundation which has been laid by the Lord himself. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone;" that is, "Behold, I give my only begotten Son to redeem a lost and perishing world, and to be the only foundation of a sure and certain hope of eternal life."

There is no truth more clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures than that salvation is of God, through Jesus Christ. Nay, this is the very sum and substance of all that the Scriptures reveal. All we like sheep had gone astray, had wandered far from God; by our transgression, our union and intercourse with heaven were broken off, our nature became depraved, and our hearts at enmity against God; but on Jesus Christ the Lord was laid the iniquity of a guilty world. He has become the Mediator between God and man, the Restorer of the breach; and the only medium of reconciliation between the offended Creator, and offending man. It is to the mediatorial work of Christ, his advent, his holy life and atoning death, his triumphant resurrection from the dead, his glorious ascension into heaven; and his prevailing intercession at the right hand of God that we are indebted for the blessings of a present

salvation, and the hope of eternal life. Hence he is very properly called a foundation : or the source of all the spiritual happiness of mankind. This foundation was to be laid in Zion. The Church of God has been established for the purpose of collecting together in one body all the real people of God, or true believers, and it is by the use of its ordinances and instituted means of grace that sinful men are brought to an experimental knowledge of God, as their Saviour, and that Christians are assisted in the discharge of their duties, and made partakers of eternal life. Now, the very reason why we are favoured with all the ordinances of religion necessary to assist us in working out the salvation of our souls, is because of the atoning mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. For had no plan of redemption been devised, through which the Lord could restore guilty man to his favour, in harmony with all the attributes of his nature, there could have been no intercourse between heaven and earth, no voice of mercy had ever saluted our ears, no church would ever have been established in the world, by the institutions of which we both learn the way of salvation, and are enabled to lay hold of eternal life. Hence Jesus Christ as the only Mediator between God and man, and the author of our present and eternal salvation, is very properly called the foundation laid in Zion, or the first stone laid, upon which the Church of God is built ; because the very first act of God in the redemption of the world was to give his only begotten Son, through whose acceptable mediations in our behalf, we enjoy through the instrumentality of the visible Church, or the spiritual Zion, those means of grace by the use of which, we, although naturally aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, are made fellow-citizens with the saints, and heirs of the heavenly inheritance.

2. But the text not only informs us that there is a found-

ation laid in Zion, but our attention is also directed to the nature of that foundation. It is a stone. It is neither wood, hay, nor stubble. Nor is this foundation composed of metal or any other fusible material. We have not time here to notice all the figures by which Jesus Christ is represented to our view, when he is set forth as the great source and the only foundation of human salvation. We merely remark that the figure under which he is represented in the text is one of striking force and beauty, and if properly understood, is most admirably adapted to afford the strongest consolation to every believing soul.

This foundation is a stone, solid, durable, and incapable of being destroyed by fire, the most destructive of all the elements of nature. And how fitly in all these respects does it represent the Lord Jesus Christ. As God, he possesses all powers both in heaven and in earth, and he is abundantly able to sustain the whole weight of that spiritual building of which he is the foundation. Although thousands and millions of guilty sinners have built on him their hopes of eternal life, he remains unshaken still; and millions more, as heavy laden as sin can make them, may rest on him with equal safety. The foundations of the mountains may be crushed beneath their superincumbent weight, but the foundation laid in Zion is ten thousand times more solid than even the basis of the everlasting hills. The whole weight of a world of perishing, but redeemed souls, will never be able to move it. He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.

But this foundation-stone is not only solid, it is also durable. The longest lapse of time, and the concussion of the many destructive elements of nature, cannot affect it in the least. Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." Heb. xiii. 8. Hear the testimony of the Lord himself con-

cerning the unchangeable perpetuity of this foundation: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. And thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Heb. i. 8, 10-12. With him there is "neither variableness nor shadow of turning." While all earthly things are liable to change and to be destroyed, he remains immutably and forever the same, unaffected by any change, and incapable of being either removed or destroyed.

This stone is also said to be "a tried stone." There is, probably, an allusion here made to the practice of every wise master-builder or skilful architect, of trying or proving the quality and fitness of the materials of which the building is composed, and especially of those materials which are designed for the most important part, such as the foundation, for if that be defective the building must sooner or later fall. Now, Jesus Christ, the foundation of this spiritual building has been tried. He was tried in the days of his humanity by all the power of temptation, and by all the afflictions and sorrows which he had to endure, in the performance of his mediatorial work. The Father tried him. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief, and to make his soul an offering for sin; and what was the result of that severe trial through which he had to pass? He showed his utmost willingness to undertake the cause of human redemption, in obedience to his Father's will, "Lo!" he says, "I come—I delight to do thy will, O God, yea, thy law is in my heart." During the whole period of his humiliation he manifested the same

willing devotedness to the work he had undertaken to accomplish. And when in full view of the last and most painful part of the trying scene, we hear him saying with the most perfect resignation: "Not my will, but thine be done." He would rather that the sword of justice should pierce his own soul, than to see even his enemies perish. So satisfactory was the trial that the Father declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" am perfectly satisfied, both as it respects his loving obedience, and his condescension for a perishing world.

Earth has tried him. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." He was derided and persecuted by those whom he came to save, but still he went about doing good. Their wicked hatred and malicious designs toward him could not quench his love for their souls, nor induce him to abandon the work of redemption. In spite of the opposition of the Scribes, and Pharisees, and the rulers of the Jews, he continued to work the work of him that sent him. He fulfilled all righteousness, and in the midst of the hostility of a wicked world, he set forth the most perfect example of patience, meekness, and forbearance, under insults of the most cruel and provoking nature. But mark, further, the unshaken constancy of his love and compassion, even for the chief of sinners, in the circumstances of his condemnation and death. Behold the multitude dragging him to Pilate's bar, and there, through their clamorous demands, procuring the sentence of death against him. See him suspended upon the cross, and the blood-thirsty multitude around, with fiend-like pleasure sporting with his sufferings. Had it been possible to destroy his compassion for guilty man, the scenes of Calvary would have been quite sufficient. But no: for this very trial he had come, and all the malice of a wicked world could not move him in the least from the accomplishment of his purpose.

In the very last hour of his trial, and while smarting under the agonies of the cross, from the fullness of his loving heart, which all their cruelty could not exhaust, his dying words were a prayer for his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." After his resurrection from the grave, and when all power was given unto him in heaven and on earth, behold with amazement for what purpose his power was employed! It was not to destroy his enemies; but to commission his apostles to go and make the very first offer of mercy to his cruel murderers.

Hell also tried this stone. All its forces were employed to destroy this foundation, and all the legion hosts of the Prince of Darkness were summoned in combined array to remove, or to crush this stone laid in Zion. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit to be tempted of the devil." But hell tried this stone in vain. All the fiery darts of the adversary fell harmless at his feet. Amidst all the storms of hellish rage, his heart was set upon the accomplishment of his glorious work; and these temptations of the enemy, instead of shaking him from his purpose, have only given him an experimental sympathy with all his tempted followers; for having been "tempted in all points like as we are," and having vanquished the tempter in every onset, he knows how to succour those who are tempted. And what is the testimony of hell after this trial? It is, "I know thee whom thou art, the only Son of God."

But this stone, or Jesus Christ, has been tried in his character as the Saviour of the world, by countless myriads of depraved, wretched, and ruined sinners, who have always found him perfectly able, as well as abundantly willing, to pardon the most aggravated guilt, to deliver from the most inveterate corruptions, to sustain in the midst of the most sore trials, and to save to the very uttermost all that come to God

through him. Millions upon millions have already built their hopes upon this stone; they have ventured upon it with all their load of sin and misery, and it has never failed one of them. All that have been saved from Adam until this time, both the millions in heaven and the tens of thousands upon the earth, are living stones built upon this foundation. They have tried its strength, and found it able to sustain them all. O could we collect the testimony of the saints of every age who have tried this foundation-stone, how would it encourage us to make trial of the same! We should hear a pious Job saying: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Job xix. 25-27. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job xiii. 15. We should hear the Psalmist exclaiming, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psalms xxiii. 4. "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." Psalms lxxiii. 26. We should hear the apostle Paul, after having tried this stone for many years, testifying even in prospect of his final dissolution, "I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Tim. iv. 6-8. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor

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powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans viii. 37-39. We might hear also the testimony of Polycarp, who, when brought before the heathen rulers, and being asked if he would abjure Christ, replied, "Forty and six years have I served him, and he has never forsaken me, and how can I now deny him?" And O how many living witnesses could bear a similar testimony. The longer they have tried him the more fully they can trust in him. Millions of penitent souls, as guilty as sin can make them, have tried and found that he is able and willing to save the chief of sinners. Tens of thousands of faithful Christians have tried him amidst every variety of worldly affliction and sorrow, and have found his grace sufficient to help them in every time of need. It is therefore in the character of a *tried* Saviour that he is now presented to us. And after a trial of nearly six thousand years, during which period none have ever trusted in him in vain, what abundant encouragement have we to build all our hopes of present and future bliss upon him alone. He is and will be the same through every age of time, and what he has been to his people hitherto, he will be unto the end of time; and in the language of the poet we may say:

"Millions of transgressors poor,
Thou hast for Jesu's sake forgiven;
Made them of thy favour sure,
Snatched from hell to heaven:
Millions more thou ready art
To save and to forgive;
Every soul and every heart
Of man thou wouldst receive."

But this stone is also "a precious corner-stone." Corner-stones serve three very important purposes in the building of which they form a part, viz: union, strength, and beauty. They

unite the two sides of the building, and consequently render it strong and firm. They impart to it a beauty and grandeur in appearance, which it would not otherwise possess. They also serve for direction in the erection of the edifice, as all the other stones must be squared and regulated by the corner-stone. Now, in all these respects how fitly is Jesus Christ represented by the corner-stone. He is the bond of union between heaven and earth, and he also unites all the parts of that spiritual edifice which contains both Jews and Gentiles, and incorporates the believers of every nation in one harmonious bond of brotherly love. It is of this the apostle speaks when he says, "He is our peace, who hath made both one," that is, he has united both Jews and Gentiles in one body; brought them both in harmonious compact into that building of which he is the chief corner-stone, and in whom all the building fitly framed together, composed of materials collected from all the nations of the world, and united in Jesus Christ, "groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord." Ephes. ii. But Jesus Christ is called a corner-stone to signify his peculiar importance in this spiritual building. He is sometimes called the chief corner-stone and the head of the corner. He occupies the most important place of all. It is he that upholds, strengthens, and beautifies the whole. Without him, apostles, prophets and all, are but sinking sand. On him all their doctrines depend; in him they all meet as their common centre, and from him they all derive their saving efficacy. Take away this corner-stone and immediately the saints in heaven fall from their thrones, and the saints upon earth who are gradually rising towards heaven sink forever. Remove this corner-stone, and this glorious living temple, which has been rising and increasing for so many ages, falls to the ground and covers heaven and earth with its ruins.

But Jesus Christ is here called "a precious corner-stone." There may probably be an allusion in this expression to the custom which obtains amongst some architects of making the corner-stones of a finer quality of material than the other parts of the building. Hence they may be called precious corner-stones, because of the superior quality of the material of which they are made. And in this respect it may be said of Jesus Christ, that he is a precious corner-stone. Although he possessed a nature similar to ours and became our kinsman according to the flesh, yet that nature was perfectly free from all those sinful infirmities to which human nature in its fallen state is subject. "He was holy, harmless, undefiled" by the least taint of sin, "and separate from sinners." And hence, as it respects the superior excellence of his human nature, he is precious, fairer than the children of men, and far superior to any of the lively stones in the spiritual Zion. But he is more especially precious with regard to the divine dignity of his person, as possessing "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," the sum total of all divine excellencies, and as clothed with all the virtues of a perfect man. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Col. ii. 3. "For it pleaseth the Father that in him should all fullness dwell." Col. i. 19. In short, all moral excellency, divine and human, created and uncreated, centre in him, and render him infinitely precious and valuable. He is precious to his Father; he is styled "his only begotten and beloved Son in whom he is well pleased; his elect, in whom his soul delighteth." He is the object of the ceaseless adoration of all the angelic hosts, who ever celebrate his praise in strains of most harmonious melody, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

He is precious to every sincere penitent and to all true believers. The apostle Peter says, "To you therefore which believe he is precious." His atoning blood is called "precious blood," his promises "precious promises," and the gifts which he bestows are represented by "gold tried in the fire." Behold him in whatever respect we may, and how incomparably glorious does he appear to every believing soul. How precious are his encouraging invitations and promises to the poor mourning, guilty, self-condemned sinner, who is earnestly seeking the pardon of his sins. Ah, it is the name of Jesus that sounds sweeter in his ears than all the music of earth.

"Jesus the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given;
It scatters all their guilty fear:
It turns their hell to heaven.
Jesus the prisoner's fetters breaks,
And bruises Satan's head;
Power into strengthless souls it speaks,
And life into the dead."

How precious is his sanctifying grace to those who feel the burden of their sins, and the roots of bitterness within. He is infinitely precious to his people in all the relations he bears to them as their Prophet, Priest, and King. In all the manifestations of himself to his followers, how glorious and welcome is his appearing. In darkness he is their light; in weakness their all-sufficient strength; in sorrow their joy; in distress their comfort; in temptation their deliverer; in poverty their riches; in life their portion; in death their support; and in eternity their exceeding great and everlasting reward.

This stone is also "a sure foundation." This will appear more clearly if we remember by whom it has been laid. It is not the work of either men or angels; it is the work of God, and, like him, it is immovably secure, firm, and indestructible as the

throne of God, and as permanent in its duration as the days of heaven. No weight, however heavy, can shake the foundation; nor can it be demolished by the furious attack of the combined powers of earth and hell. Upon this rock, or upon this sure foundation, says the Lord, will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This is the Rock of ages which cannot be removed; and it is a sure foundation, because it is a tried one. Already has it existed nearly six thousand years amidst the surrounding hostility of men and devils, and it has never failed one of those humble penitents who have cast themselves upon it with all their load of sin and misery.

But this is "a sure foundation," if we consider, further, that it is both suitable and sufficient. In the first place, then, it is a suitable foundation. The suitability of this foundation arises from the incarnation of the Son of God. "For as the children were made partakers of flesh and blood, it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and a faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For we have not an high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He has an experimental knowledge of all our sorrows, trials, and temptations; and having suffered himself, he knows how to succour and sympathize with his tempest-tossed and afflicted people. In his human nature he offered a suitable sacrifice for our sins, as the representative of our guilty race; and having exalted his glorified humanity to the right hand of God, he ever lives to pour forth his prevailing intercessions in our behalf. But this foundation is sure, because it is sufficient to sustain the whole weight of the spiritual building erected upon it. Jesus Christ

is God, possessing almighty power ; and he is abundantly able to uphold, to save, and to exalt to joys on high, the thousands and millions of immortal spirits who build on him their hopes of eternal life. All who trust in him are sure of his mercy to pardon their most numerous and aggravated transgressions ; sure of his sanctifying Spirit to cleanse them from all unrighteousness ; sure of his abundant grace to help them in every time of need ; sure of victory over legions of malignant foes ; triumph in the hour of danger ; and sure of a crown of unfading glory. And this is the only sure foundation, because it is the only one that is sufficient. None but God can save perishing sinners ; and he is able to save them to the uttermost. They are secure amidst all the dangers that surround, while they are upheld and protected by the everlasting arms of Jehovah. The security of those who believe in Jesus, and build on him as their only foundation, is most beautifully represented by the Saviour where he says,—“ Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock : And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.” Millions now in heaven have found this a sure foundation, even while wading through deep waters of affliction, and passing over the Jordan of death. If they were now to give their testimony, it would be similar to that of Hopeful to Christian when they were passing over Jordan to enter the gates of the Celestial City : “ Oh brother,” said Christian, “ the waves roll over me ; I sink in deep waters where there is no standing.” “ No, brother,” replied Hopeful, “ I feel the bottom, it is good.” And such has been the happy experience of all the saints of God. They have in this foundation a sure support, when both heart and flesh and every other refuge have failed them.

But the text says, in the last place, "He that believeth shall not make haste." The apostle Paul in quoting this passage, says, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Rom. x. 11. And Peter says, "He shall not be confounded." The meaning of all these appears to be the same, and they all are doubtless designed to set forth the immovable security of the true believer. He that believeth on him, or that trusts in this foundation, shall be so fully satisfied of his safety, both for time and for eternity, that he will not make haste to leave it, nor will he ever be induced to forsake this object of his trust, or place confidence in any other. In patience he will possess his soul; and even when his trust would appear to be vain and unreasonable, he will wait for Providence to interpret his own dispensations, confidently assured that in his own good time he will make it appear that "all things work together for good to those who love God," and trust in him with an unshaken confidence. He shall not make haste to judge of the dealings of God towards him; but even in the midst of trials and afflictions, he will wait in patient expectation of coming forth out of the furnace of affliction as gold seven times purified. And he that believeth shall not be ashamed of his confidence, nor be confounded by having that confidence disappointed. Haste is generally the cause of shame, and shame produces confusion. So that he who believes and rests on Jesus Christ as the only tried and sure foundation, and waits in calm but confident expectation for the consummation of his hopes, in the manner and time in which a wise and overruling Providence shall see proper to accomplish his gracious designs towards his people, shall neither be ashamed nor confounded. He shall finally receive the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul, and be raised up from his place as a living stone in the spiritual Zion on earth, to dwell in the

heavenly Jerusalem, and to be a pillar in the house above, to go no more out forever. Such, then, is the security and the bliss of those who believe in Jesus Christ, the foundation laid in Zion. May we all be built up as lively stones in this spiritual house, and finally be exalted to the fairer mansions above, for the Redeemer's sake!

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SERMON XIII.

THE GREAT SPIRITUAL BUILDER.

THUS SPEAKETH THE LORD OF HOSTS, SAYING, BEHOLD THE MAN WHOSE NAME IS THE BRANCH; AND HE SHALL GROW UP OUT OF HIS PLACE, AND HE SHALL BUILD THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD :

EVEN HE SHALL BUILD THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD; AND HE SHALL BEAR THE GLORY, AND SHALL SIT AND RULE UPON HIS THRONE; AND HE SHALL BE A PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE : AND THE COUNSEL OF PEACE SHALL BE BETWEEN THEM BOTH.

ZECH. vi. 12, 13.

THE patriotism of the Jewish nation was of a peculiar character. It was not a mere bigoted attachment to the soil of their ancestral inheritance, nor a blind preference for the civil institutions under whose benign influence they had spent their childhood, formed their habits, and which now mingled their associations in all that was pleasing in the recollections of their early years. ✓

Theirs was the patriotism of piety; an ardent devotedness to that form of government which had been established by the God of their fathers; and an almost unconquerable attachment to that land which had been promised to Abraham, and subsequently possessed by his posterity, and which was especially endeared to them as the scene of the most wonderful

displays of Jehovah's presence and power. But amongst all the objects of their attention and desire, the holy city, with its hallowed associations, held the chief place. Thither the tribes went up, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. Whatever their afflictions might be, they still pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Wheresoever they were scattered amongst the nations of the earth, and deprived of their religious privileges, with their faces turned toward Jerusalem they pour out their fervent benedictions, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." If in sadness, while sitting by the rivers of Babylon, the scenes of other days passed in review before them, the deep feeling of their hearts found utterance in gushing tears, when they remembered Zion. Nor could all the taunts of their enemies induce them to take their harps from the willows, and tune them to the sacred songs of the sanctuary while dwelling in a strange land.

Their captivity in Babylon, though trying to their faith, had not entirely cut off their hopes in the final fulfillment of all the Divine promises given to them as the chosen people of God. Nor had it damped the ardour of their zeal for the house of God, and their desire to repair the desolations of their beloved city; to restore their religious services, and to look for the redemption of the promised Messiah.

In times of their greatest afflictions they were not left without tokens, more or less significant, to encourage their faith and enkindle their zeal. By various expressive figures they were frequently directed to look forward, and contemplate the advent, character, and work of the Redeemer of Israel. Of this nature was the ceremony here described. Some of the children of the captivity had but lately returned from Babylon. While they were zealously engaged in their work of patriotism and piety, as if to animate their hopes, the word of the Lord

came to the prophet Zechariah, directing him to take with him certain of those who had returned from Babylon, and go into the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah : and to take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua, the son of Josedec, the High Priest, and speak unto him, saying, " Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH ; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord : even he shall build the temple of the Lord ; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne ; and he shall be a priest upon his throne : and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

These words contain a most beautiful and significant description of the character and work of the predicted Messiah.

I. That the person to whom this significant and prophetic ceremony refers is the Messiah, does not admit the possibility of a doubt. The name by which he is designated is highly descriptive both of his character and work. The term here employed literally signifies, to grow, shoot out, or spring forth. The figure is most probably taken from that of a decayed stock, apparently destitute of the principle of vegetable life, shooting forth fresh sprouts which astonish the beholder by the vigour of their growth.

How properly this figure applies to Christ, all the circumstances connected with his appearance in the form of humanity fully show. The family of David, from which he was descended, might very properly be compared to, or represented by, the decaying or decayed stump of a once stately tree. It had lost its former dignity and renown. The sceptre it had once wielded over an obedient people, and over submissive foes, was now held by but a palsied hand, and was just ready to fall forever. Hence the prophet Isaiah describes the peculiar condition of

the family of David : " And there shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse ; and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Isaiah xi. 1. When the stem of Jesse was decayed, and the house of David, once so glorious, was reduced to a state of the lowest depression, and no longer distinguished by that regal dignity which it once possessed, then it was that the Branch or the Messiah sprung up, and from an obscure and humble origin he advanced to the supreme dignity of King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hence this prophecy may be viewed as descriptive of the humanity of Christ. He is here called " the man whose name is The Branch, and he shall grow up out of his place." It had been predicted that the Messiah should appear in the form of a man, of the house and lineage of David. He appeared first as a babe in Bethlehem. He grew up, and advanced, through the successive stages of human existence until he arrived at the full strength and vigour of manhood. Having accomplished the labours, and endured the sufferings of his mediatorial work, he ascended to sit upon the throne of his father David, to order it and establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever : and thus a Prince of that illustrious royal line is now " Prince of the kings of the earth."

But the prophetic figure here employed, may also be viewed as descriptive of the work he was to perform.

The " Branch" was to grow up out of its place, and become itself a goodly tree. Like as in the process of vegetation, the weak and pliant shoot becomes a stately tree ; so was it to be with the Messiah in his progress from his lowly condition, to glory and dominion. His real character, which was concealed under the veil of his humanity, was sometimes dimly seen in the miracles he wrought, and in the wisdom of his teachings ; but it was displayed more significantly in the

scene of the transfiguration, until bursting from the confinement of the tomb, he declared his universal authority and power, and ascended in triumph to his throne in the heavens.

The progress of his kingdom in the world may very properly be represented by a branch. The largest and most luxuriant branch upon a stem was once a bud. The mightiest results had once a small beginning. So it was with the Messiah's kingdom. A despised Galilean, and a few Jewish peasants, without name or influence, were the only visible instruments employed in promoting that cause which was designed to increase, until the entire world of mankind should be embraced, and enjoy its unspeakable benefits. The figure here employed very appropriately describes the beginning and progress of this work. The Jewish Church, at the time of the Messiah's advent, was in a fallen state, devoid of spiritual life. From this decayed and lifeless mass, the seeds of the new religion sprung up. For a time it was like its Author, despised and rejected of men. But the Branch grew. Unfruitful as was the soil, it continued to increase until it became beautiful and glorious. The heaven-descended truths of the Gospel triumphed over the hostility of man's fallen nature, humbled the proud philosophy of the learned Greek, subdued the stubborn bigotry of the Jew, dispelled the densest darkness, broke the strongest chains of the Gentile world, and shed the mercy and peace of heaven into those dominions where cruelty revelled amidst the ruins of human happiness.

This figure may also be viewed as highly descriptive of the nature of his work—the grace of God in the soul. It progresses from a small, and often an unpromising beginning, until it accomplishes its most glorious results. Hence the figures employed by the Saviour himself, in illustrating the nature of his work in the heart. The kingdom of God is

likened unto a grain of mustard seed, which, though the least of all seeds, by the process of vegetation becomes a great tree. A single ray of Divine light shed into the soul is often the unauspicious commencement of this work. That ray penetrates the gross darkness of the mind, infuses the quickening principle of spiritual life, and continues to receive fresh accessions, until the whole soul is illumined with the incipient splendours of the light of heaven, imparting to fallen and polluted man that moral excellence and spiritual purity which fits him for his heavenly home, and for the employment of that glorious state.

The figure here employed may be considered as representing the mysterious and irresistible manner in which the work of Christ is carried on and finally accomplished. That the seed vegetates, the plant grows, and the branch increases, as the consequence of their connection with their respective sources of vegetable life, is a fact universally admitted; but who can explain the mystery? Who can describe, or even understand the mode of operation by which these mysterious processes are continually going on, and with the results of which all are so familiar? So is it in the work of Christ. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," the sound is heard and its effects are seen, but its origin and end who can tell? The dark mind is enlightened, the dead soul is quickened, the careless sinner is alarmed, the penitent believer receives the joyous assurance of pardon, the depraved spirit puts on the beauty of holiness; but who can unfold the mystery? The cause is revealed; but the mysterious mode of its operation is not explained. It is the power of God. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Nothing less than the omnipotence of Jehovah is sufficient to produce such mighty effects. Not all the evidence of miracles and prophecy, nor the commanding reason, nor the

beauteous simplicity and holiness of Christianity, could have given it success in a world where it was hated and despised for the very reason of its truth and excellence. It is received as the remedy only when the Spirit convinces men of sin, of righteousness, and a judgment to come. And while this unseen agent is at work, the cause of the Redeemer will advance whatever obstacles oppose. For as the branch, which derives its nourishment from the stock, displays an irresistible power of increase, and extracts strength, beauty and fruit, from storms and rains, and wintry snows, as well as from the milder influences of the summer air and genial sun-beams, so while God works mightily in us by his Spirit, and goes forth with his hosts to battle, all our temptations and afflictions, and every apparently adverse circumstance, will contribute to our prosperity, and the wrath of the enemy and the avenger will be so controlled as to contribute to the ultimate accomplishment of His purposes of redeeming mercy.

But the prophet here also describes the work which was to be the special object of the Messiah's coming. "And he shall build the temple of the Lord;" and in order to show the certainty of the thing, and to render it more emphatic, he repeats it, "Even he shall build the temple of the Lord:" that is, just as certainly as they were now engaged in raising the ruins of their city and temple, just so surely shall he whose coming is thus figuratively predicted, perform the work for which he is appointed—the building of that spiritual temple, and preparing it for an habitation of God.

The great work of patriotism and piety in which these ransomed captives were now engaged, is here made by this significant ceremony to bear a spiritual import, and by it they are directed to the contemplation of that grand object, to the accomplishment of which all the Divine manifestations referred.

The condition of their city and temple, in ruins, might be viewed as portraying the moral desolations of mankind, without the cheering tokens of the Divine presence, without any defence against the assaults, and tyrannizing and ruinous dominion of their malignant foes, exposed to the unmitigated evils of their fallen state, and to the rewards of transgression in a future world. That soul and body which were originally designed to be the habitation of God through the spirit, had now become the abode of an envious usurper, who exercised his cruel power without pity and without remorse. The light of the Divine countenance was withdrawn, and the dense gloom of a moral night enveloped his soul, darkening his moral perceptions, vitiating his passions, and rendering him the perfect contrast of the character he was designed to bear.

Now the work of the Messiah is set forth by the enterprise in which these ransomed captives were at this time engaged. Thus while this significant ceremony encouraged them with the prospect of the final completion of their design, notwithstanding all the opposition of their enemies; it taught them also that the Messiah himself was to be the Great temple-builder, that he was to be the Architect of that more glorious, spiritual house, of which both the old and new temples were expressive types.

This man whose name was The Branch is to build the temple of the Lord, to lay the foundation, raise the superstructure, and sustain the Christian Church. This was to be a spiritual temple, the house not made with hands, composed of lively stones, polished and cemented together by the skill of the great Architect himself. We need not stop to attempt the proof of that truth, so generally admitted, that the Christian Church is the work of Christ; nor of the truth, that each

individual member of that Church, is prepared for the place occupied in it, by the possessing of that saving grace of which he alone is the author and source: but we notice more particularly, that a temple of God on earth implies the residence of God amongst men; and the special object of the Messiah's mediatorial manifestation was to restore the residence of God with man.

When he ascended on high he led captivity captive, he received gifts for men, yea even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Now the residence of God in this spiritual temple is effected by his presence and abode in each of the lively stones of which it is composed. Every part of this temple, all the materials employed in its erection, are instinct with the spirit and life of the great Builder.

Thus the apostle Peter addresses the believers, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." 1 Peter ii. 5. Hence God dwells in his temple, or in his Church, because he dwells in the hearts of his people, each member of his church; or every heart renewed and sanctified by his grace is the temple of the living God. Hence the work of the Messiah in building the temple of the Lord, is carried on and accomplished in the conversion of sinners, and in the sanctification and edification of believers; thus reconciling man to God, purifying his soul, and preparing it for the dwelling place of the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity. Nor has any person any part in this spiritual building until taken from the rude mass of nature, and fitted and polished, and thus prepared for a place by the skill of the Divine Architect himself. No merely human qualifications however perfect, external professions however high, nor any pretended claims however confidently put forth, can be received in the absence of the evidence afforded

by the unequivocal marks of the workmanship of the Heavenly Artist. Men may boast of their apostolic order—of their ecclesiastical antiquity, and of their supposed virtue of episcopal successional authority; but if they cannot exhibit the significant tokens of the presence and work of the great Builder of the spiritual temple, in the living piety, and holiness of their lives, all their pretensions and Pharisaical claims that the “temple of the Lord are we, and heathens all the world beside,” are as empty as the sounding of the senseless brass or the tinkling symbol. And how incomparably foolish and wicked for any association of individuals to lay claim to the attributes of even any part of this spiritual temple, while in their individual experience and conduct they furnish the clearest evidence of being utter strangers to the transforming power of the Heavenly Builder! Yet how many are there, who are saying in the darkness, and haughty pride of their unrenewed hearts, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we,” while their conduct too plainly evinces that they are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. They are building their hopes of salvation upon that baseless fabric of a vision—a mere professed or imaginary connection with some lifeless form of Christianity. But in the erection of this glorious temple, the whole of the work, from the laying of the foundation to the bringing forth of the top stone, is emphatically the work of Christ. Every soul delivered from the darkness and slavery of sin, impressed with the image of Christ, and animated by his spirit, is a lively stone in this temple—raised up and fitted, and kept in its place by the immediate agency of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although human instrumentality may be employed in the erection of this edifice, it is in such a way that the excellency of the power may be displayed to be of God, and not of man; and it is only so far as human

agency is accompanied by the invisible power of Jehovah, that it is successful in promoting the accomplishment of this work. This spiritual temple, the Church of God, is composed of all true believers of every name and nation, who have been made partakers of the saving grace of the Gospel, and walk in obedience to the Divine commandments. They are the work of the Messiah or Branch. By his power they have been raised from the rough quarry of fallen nature, fitted by his own plastic hand, and polished after the similitude of a palace, assigned their proper places, and each enabled to contribute its part to the beauty, strength, and final completion of the whole design.

Therefore, as the sole author and finisher of this work, he shall receive the undivided honour of its completion: "And he shall bear the glory."

This may be intended to encourage Ezra and his companions in their arduous enterprise by the hope of transmitting their names with honour to posterity as the restorers of their country's glory; but it is chiefly designed to set forth the high reward of the Redeemer's mediatorial work. He shall bear the glory of the blessed results of the scheme of redemption; and when all the ransomed hosts of earth shall meet around the eternal throne, with one harmonious song of triumph they will ascribe to him the glory of their salvation, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is He to receive honour and power, and might, and dominion, forever and ever.

But this declaration is, perhaps, principally descriptive of the honour and dignity of his character in the exercise of the prerogatives of his two-fold office of king and priest. He shall bear the glory of the regal character and office, for he shall sit and rule upon his throne.

His glory is here set forth by this description of his regal character: a throne, denoting both dignity and dominion, the

highest exaltation, and the possession of supreme power. As a prince of an illustrious royal line, it had been prophesied of him that he should sit "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice," and by the splendour and perpetuity of his reign, he was to obtain the honour of restoring or raising up the departed glory of that fallen house. Hence it was said, "They shall hang upon him all the glory of his Father's house." But the glory which he is to bear consists not merely in his regal dignity and dominion, but in addition to this he shall possess the honour of the priestly or mediatorial character: "For he shall be a priest upon his throne." With the majesty and power of a king, he shall possess the condescension and compassion of a priest. He shall bear the glory of a royal priesthood. This was an honour to which none could attain, according to the institutions of the Levitical economy.

The prophetic and priestly offices were sometimes united in the same person, and also the regal and prophetic, but never were the royal and priestly character and office sustained and exercised by the same individual except in the case of Melchisedek, who, as a type of Christ, received his appointment not according to any established rule of succession, but by a special Divine appointment; or, as the apostle expresses it: Who was made a priest, "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." Heb. vii. 16. So the infinite superiority of the official character of the Messiah is represented not only in the mode of his appointment, but also in his bearing the glory of regal dignity and dominion, and of the priestly character and office. While as a king upon his throne the whole weight of the government shall be upon his shoulders, and he is employing his preroga-

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tives in the just and equitable administration of all its affairs, he will at the same time perform the duties of his sacerdotal office, for "He shall be a priest upon his throne." And these two offices, though seemingly incompatible, and the duties such as might appear impossible to be performed by the same individual, are combined and harmonized in the person of the Messiah for the accomplishment of the glorious purposes of redeeming mercy, and the salvation of mankind.

"Hence," says the prophet, "The counsel of peace shall be between them both." That is, doubtless, between his kingly and priestly offices; or, the grand design for which he sustains these two offices is to reconcile the world to God. By the meritorious sacrifice which he has offered as our High Priest, he has made peace with God for guilty man, and by his power as a king upon his throne he delivers all who obey his commands out of the hands of their spiritual enemies. In the performance of the duties of his priestly office he has made an atonement for sin. In the exercise of his regal prerogatives he rescues man from its dominion and extirpates it from the heart. As a priest he makes peace and as a king he maintains it; he sits spiritually enthroned in the heart of every true believer and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, preserving the soul in the enjoyment of a peace which passeth all understanding.

The glory of the Messiah's reign as King in Zion and High Priest of his people, and the blessed results of his reign as seen in the happiness and security of the subjects of his government, are most beautifully set forth in the 72nd Psalm: "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.

He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight." In the exercise of the duties of his two-fold office, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other, peace is proclaimed on earth, and good will amongst men.

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SERMON XIV.

THE ADVANTAGES OF FEARING GOD.

BUT UNTO YOU THAT FEAR MY NAME SHALL THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISE WITH HEALING IN HIS WINGS; AND YE SHALL GO FORTH, AND GROW UP AS CALVES OF THE STALL.

MALACHI iv. 2.

Not long after the Deity had pronounced his benediction upon his works, physical and moral, order reigning in delightful harmony throughout the newly-created empire of the globe, the pleasing proclamation is succeeded by a sad reverse. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," (Gen. vi. 5,) was the mournful tale that so speedily followed the happier declaration concerning the works of creation. The glorious light which shone in the tabernacle of man's heart, and the celestial splendour beaming forth from every part of the heavens and the earth, whose converging rays met in the one point, declaring the glory of God, and conducing to the happiness of man, were surpassed only by the thick gloom and denser darkness which had enveloped the earth, when the voice of Inspiration uttered the fearful fact, "Darkness shall cover

the earth, and gross darkness the people." Isaiah lx. 2. To dispel this gloom, and to rend from our world the thick curtains of moral night, Jehovah promised to the sinning pair that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Gen. iii. 15. This personage was subsequently revealed and promised to the patriarchs and prophets, under different names and by various types and shadows, more or less clear as the time of his advent drew nigh.

He is called by Isaiah, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." The prophets, when wrapped in visions of futurity, and beholding the latter-day glory of the Church, exhort her to "arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!" "For," says Isaiah, (lx. 2, 3,) "darkness shall cover the earth (the unrighteous), and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." To this auspicious period, the bright and glorious dispensation of the Gospel, the believers of ancient days were directed to look for the fulfillment of those prophecies concerning the glory of the second temple, which should so far exceed the glory of the first, being beautified and adorned by the presence of him, who was called, "The Desire of nations." To those happy days the kings and prophets of former times looked with ardent desire and longing expectations, each succeeding generation more strongly hoping to be the favoured one upon whom this heavenly Luminary would shed his cheering rays. And the Redeemer, when describing to those who lived in the days of his incarnation the superior privileges which they enjoyed above those who had preceded them upon the stage of action, says, "Blessed are your eyes, for

they see : and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Matt. xiii. 16, 17. So exceedingly did Simeon rejoice, that his eyes were permitted to see the pleasing sight—

"Which kings and prophets waited for,
And sought, but never found"—

that he had not a wish beyond it. With a bounding heart he exclaimed, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word : for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people." Luke ii. 29-31.

There were some, indeed, in all ages of the Jewish Church "who waited for the consolation of Israel;" but long ere the advent of the Messiah, the greater part of the nation had gone away from the ordinances of God, and lost even the dim light which prophecy afforded to the just and devout.

The prophet Malachi, who prophesied about 400 years before the coming of the Shiloh, was the last in the order of time that was sent to reprove the Israelites for their sins, and to exhort them to return to God. He charges the people with the most enormous crimes, even the crimes of robbing God, and causing others to stumble. The sins of the priests and the people he sets before them in the most glaring light, and denounces against them the heaviest curses, and yet encourages them with the most gracious promises of success to return to God. He commences this chapter, which closes the Old Testament, with a prophecy concerning a future and sorer punishment than had ever as yet fallen upon that nation. "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as

an oven : and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble : and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Mal. iv. 1. This is generally supposed to apply to the destruction of Jerusalem, than which, perhaps, a heavier judgment had never before visited them. They had now filled up the measure of their iniquities, The servants of the heavenly vine-yard Planter they had entreated despitely and slain, and as if it were necessary to complete the score of their crimes, they seize the heir, and put him to a shameful death. "The vials of the wrath of God" are unstopped, the sweeping storm of extermination passes over their guilty land, and as a nation they exist no more. But shall the righteous be forgotten? Shall they be commingled in the ruin of wicked, and partake of the scourges sent for the punishment of them only? No, says the Almighty, "for they are graven upon the palms of my hands." Isaiah xlix. 16. "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." Psalms lxxxxi. 7, 8. The proud rejectors, and wicked crucifiers of the Saviour shall be as stubble kindled by the devouring fire: they shall be enveloped in the smoky darkness of the bottomless pit; "but unto you who fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "If the mother can forget her unlifting infant, or a bride her ornaments, then can I forget you, saith the Lord. Unless my faithfulness shall fail forevermore, you shall not share in the miseries, nor be involved in the destruction of the wicked.

In pursuing this subject, we notice—

I. The characters here spoken of : and,

II. Their blessedness.

The persons here addressed are said to fear the Lord, and in this place, doubtlessly, reference is made to those who in the midst of surrounding corruption remained uncontaminated, and held fast their integrity, who, notwithstanding many of their fellow-countrymen had gone away from the ordinances of God, and in practice, at least, had thrown off their subjection to him, had maintained their allegiance to the King of kings. But if this prophecy is applied to the days of the Gospel, the characters here addressed are the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are two classes of persons who may be said to fear the Lord, in the sense this phrase as used in the Scriptures. The first are those who are generally termed "penitents" or "seekers of salvation." David says (Psalms cxi. 10), "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ;" and Solomon in Proverbs i. 9, and ix. 10, teaches the same doctrine.

The most advanced state in the scale of human depravity which it is possible for man to attain, appears from the moral thermometer of St. Paul, (Rom. iii. 18,) to be that of having no fear of God before his eyes. Sin has so hardened his heart that he feels not the terrors of the Lord. So firmly has it closed his eyes that he sees not the danger to which he is exposed ; but to him the penitent forms a perfect contrast. He "was *once* alive without the law," but now the commandment with all its spirituality has come home to his heart ; sin has revived ; his transgressions gather around him as a cloud, he hears now as he never heard before the fearful declaration of the law, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Ezekiel xviii. 4 ; his false hopes die within him, his vain conceits disappear

as the early dew, and penetrated with a lively sense of his danger the language of his heart will be :

" I tremble lest the wrath divine,
Which bruises now my sinful soul,
Should bruise this wretched soul of mine,
Long as eternal ages roll."

He fears the Lord with that slavish fear which hath torment. The Holy Spirit operating upon his heart, and illuminating his mind, convinces him of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He trembles while this Heavenly Orator reasons with him of " righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come;" his sins are marshalled before him as an army in fearful and in bold array ; the standard of true righteousness is no longer with him a partial conformity to some rules of outward conduct ; he is convinced that " the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good," (Rom. vii. 12 :) the exceeding broadness of the commandment has slain him; his ideas of the uprightness of his own life, and his conformity to the righteousness of the law, have vanished away before the revealing light of the Spirit of truth, and convinced of his aggravated and continued offences, he is ready to confess with one of old, " In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.

The solemnity and strict scrutiny of the judgment he feels unprepared to meet; thrown into the balances of the sanctuary, the fearful declaration, " Thou art found wanting," falls upon his ears, and strikes him with terror and dismay. Such is the state of the man who has the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. He begins to seek a covert from the impending storm; from the avenger of blood he betakes himself to the city of refuge; to the propitiatory, or mercy-seat he directs his trembling steps, and there, as a guilty wretch,

" By sin, alas ! undone,"

he groans the sinner's only plea,

" I am condemned, but Christ has died."

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The other character is he who has obtained the favour of God. In the fear of the Lord is comprised every virtue of the christian character. Job says, (Job xxviii. 28,) "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." *He* fears the Lord, but in a different sense from the former, not as a condemned criminal fears the execution of the sentence, nor as the abject slave fears a cruel master. He fears the Lord as an obedient child does a tender and loving parent. This fear so far from rendering him miserable, in reality increases his happiness. Sin being the cause of whatever misery exists in the world, and this fear leading him to avoid those practices forbidden in the word of God, he is thus freed from guilty fear and forebodings of condemnation. He fears not indeed the terrors of the Lord, nor the denunciations of his wrath, only as the sheltered traveller fears the howling tempest. As he fears to leave the covert which screens him from the storm, so the christian dares not be found one moment without the cleft of the Rock, the Redeemer's wounded side. He fears to offend Him to whom he is indebted for life, and breath, and all things. He fears to transgress His commandments lest he should lose his favour, which to him is better than life, and the loss of which he dreads more than the loss of all things else beside. Hence with the poet he can say,

"I want the witness, Lord,
That all I do is right,
According to thy will and word,
Well pleasing in thy sight.
I ask no higher state,
Indulge me but in this;
And soon or later then translate
To my eternal bliss."

This filial fear leads him to a constant and cheerful obedience. His meat and drink is to do the will of his Heavenly Master; delightful indeed are the duties enjoined upon him, to follow in the footsteps of Him who has gone before him, and by a

growing likeness to the Pattern of excellence, to seek the perfection of the Gospel inheritance.

II. We consider the privilege of those who fear the Lord.

To those who fear the name of the Lord the prophet says, "the Sun of Righteousness shall arise." By the Sun of Righteousness we are doubtlessly to understand the Lord Jesus Christ. He is to the spiritual what the luminary of the day is to the natural world. He is called by John the evangelist, "The true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and by St. Peter, "The Day Star." He is the source of spiritual light, communicating to all, by the agency of his Spirit, the rays of heavenly light, by which moral darkness is dispelled from our minds.

But for him the outbeamings of the Godhead had never illumined our guilty world; thick clouds and impenetrable darkness must forever have surrounded the throne of God. Nor is He merely a Sun to afford light; but he is also the Sun of Righteousness. Through him only God can be just, and the justifier of the ungodly. "He is made unto us wisdom and righteousness," the communicator of the elements of true wisdom, and by the agency of his Spirit infusing into the heart of man that leaven by which the corrupt principles are destroyed, his nature purified, and he fitted for the society of the spirits of the just made perfect.

"He will arise." Among the comparisons used in the Scriptures to illustrate the progressiveness of the light which beams upon the sinner's mind in his transition from the darkness of moral night, to the brightness of the light which fills that city where the Lord is the light, none is perhaps more beautiful than this.

The exercises of the minds of different persons under the influences of regenerating grace, are as various as the appear-

ances which present themselves upon the eastern horizon during the successive risings of the sun. It is the same sun that rises every morning, but the varied state of the atmosphere reflects different appearances upon the eye of the beholder. It is the same Spirit that worketh upon all, but there are diversities of operations.

In a cloudless morning, a considerable time before the full beams of the morning sun displace the nightly shades, faint glimmerings of light begin to make their appearance in the eastern sky, which gradually brighten until the sun appears above the horizon in all the beauty of the morning. Such is the gently progressing light, which sometimes shines upon the sinner's mind. He at first, perhaps, draws to reflect upon his state by nature. The truth, that he is in a state of alienation from God, weighs upon his mind. He becomes more and more deeply impressed with the solemn realities of eternity. The dim light is brightened by successively acceding rays. He sees more clearly his spiritual degeneracy. He feels more sensibly his misery and danger. Desires arise in his heart to flee from the wrath to come. He begins to approach the mercy seat. He views the flaming sword which guards the entrance to the tree of life; turned away, he hears there is mercy with the Lord that he may be feared, and plenteous redemption that he may be sought unto; he calls upon God, wrestles in agonizing prayer, and casts his soul upon the merits of the atoning blood. The shadows disperse, and he sees the Godhead reconciled through Jesus Christ.

On another morning clouds overspread the sky, and although the change from darkness to light is sensible and real, yet no clear rays of the sun can be discovered. Such is the manner in which another person is translated from darkness into light. He is made sensible of some change in his views and feelings,

but he cannot tell from what cause. He no longer relishes the things in which he once took delight,—he hates sin and flees from the appearance of evil; fears the frowns of an angry Creator, and desires to be delivered from sin; he is led to the exercise of prayer, and obtains a peace of mind he never felt before. He experiences a delight in the things of God, which leads him to increased earnestness in seeking the clearer light, and a brighter evidence of his acceptance with God; until, as the sun breaking forth from behind the intervening clouds, the Spirit of God shines into his heart, and gives him a clear testimony of his interest in the atoning blood. You ask such a person the exact time when he was converted to God, and he cannot tell. He knows indeed that the sun has arisen, but whether it was at five, six, or seven o'clock, he is unable to say. "Of one thing I am confident," he says, "that the darkness has fled away, and the morning light appears. I am sure the sun must have arisen, for once I could see none of the objects around me, but now they are all visible. One thing I know, of whatever else I may be ignorant, that once I was blind, but now I see; once I was in the gall of bitterness, but now I enjoy a sweet peace of mind; once I had nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, but now,

'My hope is full, O glorious hope!
Of immortality.'

Another morning the eastern sky presents a frightful aspect, enveloped in the most fearful darkness. But suddenly a tempest arises, and as suddenly sweeps away the thick clouds from the sky, and shows the morning light brightening upon the azure blue, which betokens the quick approach of the "king of day." Such is the state of another man, his mind is enveloped in the thickest gloom of moral night; he appears in a most hopeless state of darkness, and human reason would con-

clude that a miracle were necessary to turn him from darkness to light. But almost in a moment he is aroused, perhaps by some sudden and alarming providence; the thunderings of Sinai's quaking brow alarm his guilty conscience, the Spirit of God like a rushing mighty wind sweeps away the scales from his eyes; he sees himself standing upon the brink of ruin, the terrors of hell get hold upon him, and like the trembling jailer he cries, "What shall I do to be saved?" Horrid light continues to pour into his mind; he sees that to delay is to perish, and with cries for mercy he rends the very heavens, and seizes the kingdom of heaven with violent hands. He obtains deliverance, and like the wave-tossed vessel anchored in the harbour, he rests securely upon the Rock of Ages.

Perhaps no two mornings since the creation have presented appearances exactly similar; some slight tinge or faint hue in the colour of the sky has kept up in succession an endless variety. Infinity appears not more in the natural than in the spiritual world. Never were the exercises of two persons under the influence of awakening and converting grace precisely the same.

The poet says,

"A thousand ways has Providence,
To bring believers home;"

and it may be added, an equal number of ways has the Spirit of God to bring sinners from darkness to light. The infinitely varied constitutions of human minds will cause a diversity in the operations of the same Spirit. One is suddenly aroused to a concern for his soul, and is almost as soon brought to a knowledge of the truth. Another sees not so clearly, nor feels so deeply, his lost estate, nor does he obtain so clear an evidence of his acceptance with God; he sees men but as trees walking. One says, "At such an hour or minute I saw the sun arise. I

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was looking upon the eastern sky, and I saw it make its appearance above the horizon. I know that at such a time, and in such a place, God for Christ's sake pardoned my sins. Then and there my soul was illuminated by the light of God's countenance, and I first experienced the joys of salvation.' Another says, "I saw the night depart and the day advance, but the exact time when the sun appeared above the horizon I am unable to determine; but I can as easily doubt of my existence as of the rising of the sun. I sought the Lord earnestly; the distress of my mind was removed; my sins which pressed upon me with a mountain weight have disappeared; a sweet peace has taken possession of my mind; I once hated God, but now I love him; I once had no delight in the things of God, but now it is my meat and drink to do the will of my Master; and although I cannot refer to the precise moment when I first tasted that the Lord was gracious, yet in this will I be confident, that the Lord hath brought me out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God."

The Holy Scriptures teach the growth and increase of the Christian in grace and knowledge. As the sun stops not at the horizon but pursues his shining way to meridian splendour, so does the Christian from the time of his illumination urge on his pilgrimage towards his place of destination. To the believer shall the Sun of righteousness arise as well as to the penitent. He is indeed brought to behold the light of life; but that light admits of different degrees of brightness. As the child advances through the different stages of human life, towards the full maturity of years, so does the man who fears the Lord proceed from one degree of grace to another, until he is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He is able at first to bear only the gentle morning rays of the Sun

of righteousness ; he can understand only the most simple gospel truths ; he has need to be fed with milk, and not with strong meat, and to be instructed with the plainest doctrines of Christianity. As he follows on to know the Lord, new developments of the saving plan are spread before him, sublimer ideas of the scheme of redemption occupy his mind, he entertains more enlarged views and more comprehensive conceptions of the wisdom of God in the operations of his providence and grace ; and adding grace to grace he is finally able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

The sun in ascending to the meridian affords not increasing light merely, but also heat more intense, and by his rays warms, invigorates, and enlivens the animal and vegetable creation. The Christian does not receive all his joys, nor does he experience his holiest delights at the commencement of his career. As there is in his life a growth in knowledge, an increase of spiritual light, so is there also a progressiveness in his enjoyments. It has been said that he can never be so happy afterwards as he is at the time of his first obtaining the favour of God. We have not so learned Christ. He may at the first experience the joy of deliverance from danger, but he will feel a more supreme delight in advancing towards the perfection of the saints. He may indeed rejoice that he has left the land of Egypt, but higher will be his notes of praise when, having passed over Jordan's severed stream, he enters the promised land. He may sing to his Great Deliverer that he has escaped unhurt from Sinai's quaking brow, but he will tune his harp to a nobler song when he arrives at Mount Zion, and the city of the living God. Heb. xii. 22-24. "With healing in his wings." This is, doubtless, a metaphor taken from the powerful effect of the rays of the sun in drying up

the stagnant waters, and thus conducing to the healthfulness of the land. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Physician of souls; he heals all our spiritual maladies, and repairs the ruins which sin has made in our moral constitution. By the influences of his Spirit the fountain of our corruptions is dried up; the rapid and wrong-flowing tide of our nature is turned into its proper channel. Under the salutary care of this Great Physician our most inveterate diseases may be cured, and restored to our primal health, we may

"Be bold to say our hallowed Lord
Hath wrought a perfect cure."

In his rays of light and grace there is *healing*, our spiritual diseases are cured, the native darkness of the mind removed, and our sin-sick souls restored to perfect health by the genial influence of his reviving beams; and in the morning of the resurrection with brighter lustre shall this glorious sun appear, and with unclouded light and increasing splendour shine forever upon the glorified saints.

"And ye shall go forth," either out of Jerusalem to Pella, where the Christians found a place of refuge; or rather, the faithful shall go forth and walk in the light of God's countenance, rejoicing in his salvation, steadily advancing in the path of grace, and running with patience and delight the race set before them. "And grow up as calves of the stall;" or, as one gives the translation, ye shall leap as calves going out of the stall. To whatever may be the allusion here made, the figure is undoubtedly used to set forth the prosperous and happy condition of the righteous. They shall be vigorous to perform their duties both temporal and spiritual, so replenished shall they be with the influences of God's Spirit, and so rich and plentiful shall be the supplies of heavenly food afforded them, that they shall be continually strengthening and increas-

ing with all the increase of God. The Psalmist in describing the happy condition of the godly man says, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth his fruit in his season : his leaf also shall not wither ; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." The prophet Hosea makes use of a figure very similar to the one in the text. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord : his going forth is prepared as the morning ; and shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." "The trees of the Lord are full of sap," says David, to denote the richness of the ground in which they are planted. Again, he says, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree ; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." He shall grow up from a babe in Christ, and nourished by food from above, he shall become a young man ; and advancing still through the progressive stages of the Christian life, he shall finally attain to the happy and honourable estate of a father in Israel.

Such are some of the exalted privileges connected with the "fear of the Lord." May it not with propriety be called "*wisdom*," to walk in the light, rather than to grope our way in darkness ? Is it not wisdom to choose the happiness of the saints in preference to the miseries of the wicked ? Whatever metaphors or figures may be used to set forth the value of the Christian's inheritance, it must ever be remembered, that they all fail in expressing the reality. Perhaps the apostle Paul gave the most comprehensive description when he said, "All things are your's ; whether Paul, or Appollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God ;" 1 Cor. iii. 21-23. To choose this estate is wisdom—to refuse it is folly. To prefer life to death is the act of sober reason,—to choose death to life is but the acts of a madman.

Permit me to inquire, in conclusion, Do you fear the name of the Lord? Have you even that godly sorrow which is working repentance unto life? Are you fearing lest you should suffer the punishment due to your sins; while darkness surrounds you, that you know not which way to flee? Trembling soul, thou hast cause to fear if thou art still unreconciled to God; and more still if thou art unconcerned! But if thou art inquiring, "Which way shall I turn my wishful eyes, or direct my trembling steps?" To you "the Sun of righteousness shall arise,"—he is not far below the horizon,—the dawning of the day begins to appear—turn and behold the cheering sight. See his brightening rays shining upon the overhanging sky; the shadows are fleeing away; intervening mists shall not long intercept the rays of light emanating from your celestial sun. Look by faith until the day break,—the shadows disperse,—and the full morning light appears.

But unto you who fear the Lord with a filial fear he shall *arise*. Although he has arisen to your spiritual vision, the light which you at present behold is but faint in comparison to that which it is your privilege to enjoy. Be not discouraged though clouds may sometimes hide him from your eyes; he still shines, and will continue to pursue his unbending course to meridian glory. Gaze upon him continually; thus will you obtain increasing light, your devotions become more fervent, your affections be more fully sanctified, and your whole soul and body be changed from glory to glory. Let your path be that of the just, which is "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But are any of you still enveloped in the gloom of moral night, and sitting in the region of the shadow of death? If you would utter the real feelings of your hearts, who would exclaim,

"O dark! dark! dark! I still must say,
Amid the blaze of gospel day."

The darkness in which you are now involved is but a prelude to the eternal darkness of the world of woe, even that thick darkness which will be felt. The gospel light you have here enjoyed will but serve to increase the horrors of eternal night. Better for you would it be in eternity, that you had never seen the light, if you shut your eyes against it now. Hasten, O sinner to work while the day lasts, for the night is coming, when you cannot work. While you have the light, walk in the light, that ye may be the children of light. But what you do, do quickly, for the sun will soon be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood; an unexpected breeze may puff out your glimmering taper, and leave you forever in that outer darkness, where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

SERMON XV.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND BECOME THE FIRST
FRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEPT.

1 COR. XV. 20.

In reading the Acts of the Apostles, and the several epistles of the inspired writers of the New Testament, we cannot but observe the importance they always attach to the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It appears that in their estimation the establishment of this truth was absolutely necessary, as forming the foundation of all the other doctrines of the Gospel. The Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel always gave it a very prominent place in their ministrations, and constantly insisted upon it, wherever they went, as a point of so much importance that it should never for a moment be forgotten.

In support of these remarks we need only refer to the chapter from which the text is taken, the whole of which is devoted to the discussion of this deeply interesting subject, and the consequences immediately connected with, or flowing from it.

The former part of this chapter is employed to show the sad conclusion to which the denial of this doctrine would inevitably

lead. The Apostle also briefly notices the evidence by which it is supported and placed beyond the possibility of being overthrown. This verse appears to be the connecting link between the former part of the chapter, in which he proves the resurrection of Christ, and the latter part, in which he shows the consequences connected with it: for having finished his arguments, he announces the conclusion as fully proved. "But now is Christ risen from the dead;" and as the consequence of his resurrection, he has "become the first fruits of them that slept."

If this subject occupied so largely the attention of the inspired apostles of our Lord and Saviour,—whose mode of preaching may always be safely followed, and who never attached to any of the doctrines of the Gospel more than its real importance—we may on this occasion spend a few moments in the consideration of this interesting subject. We have already given intimation of the two parts into which the subject contained in these words divides itself, viz.: the resurrection of Christ, and the consequence following it. In pursuing our meditations we shall notice,

I. The evidence upon which the assertion of the text rests; and

II. The importance of this doctrine as connected with our salvation, and especially with the resurrection of the body.

I. The first thing to be noticed is the reality of the death of Christ. Of this we have the fullest proof from the circumstances connected with that event. His execution was public; and in the presence of vast multitudes he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. He was crucified with common malefactors, in the usual place of execution. His side was pierced with a spear, and from the wound thus made, blood and water flowed, which must have caused instant death, had he

not been dead already. The soldiers did not break his legs—the usual practice when they wish to hasten the death of the malefactor. The reason assigned for this was that he had already expired. His enemies knew that he had predicted his own resurrection, and they would, therefore, be the more careful that he should not be removed from the cross before death had actually taken place; and Pilate refused to deliver the body for burial until he had expressly inquired of the officer on duty whether he were already dead. His body was laid in the sepulchre, and his soul, actually separated from it, went into the invisible world, as appears from his own words to the penitent thief: “Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Luke xxiii. 43. Nor was he taken away to an unknown or distant tomb. Joseph of Arimathea made no secret of the place where he had buried him. It was in his own family tomb; and the Pharisees knew well where to direct the watch which was appointed to guard the body from being removed. Thus, therefore,—the reality of his death—is fully established, and opens the way for the reality of his resurrection. When the soul departs, the body dies; when it returns and re-animates, or is united to the same body, there is a proper resurrection.

Having thus noticed the circumstances connected with the death of Christ,—which prove the reality of his death beyond doubt—the way is open for examining the evidence by which his resurrection is proved.

1. The first proof which we notice is the testimony of the disciples themselves. And here we may remark, that by both parties—by the Pharisees on the one part, and the disciples on the other—it was agreed that the body was missing, and that in the state of death it was never afterwards seen. The sepulchre was made sure; the stone at

the mouth being sealed, and a watch of sixty Roman soldiers appointed to guard it; and yet, notwithstanding these precautionary measures, the body was taken from the sepulchre, and was not to be found. Now, for this extraordinary event, the testimony of the disciples fully accounts. They declare that they saw him alive after his crucifixion; that at different times he had appeared to them, both separately and when assembled; that they had conversed with him and had touched his body. These things they affirm. Now, we may always confide in the testimony given by persons who are neither deceived themselves, nor have any motive or design to deceive others. That this was the case with the disciples of Christ will appear evident, from the very circumstances in which they were placed. 1. They could not have been deceived themselves, for they all saw him on several occasions; they conversed with him, handled his body, and saw the prints of his nails; and, finally, saw him ascend into heaven. So short a time had elapsed from his death unto his resurrection, that they had such a perfect recollection of him, as to prevent any deception or mistake as to the identity of his person. St. Luke says, in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that "he showed himself alive (*to the apostles whom he had chosen*) after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Acts i. 3. And in the commencement of this chapter the Apostle states "that he was seen of Cephas, (or Peter) then of the twelve. After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Now these proofs of resurrection were so positive as to render it impossible that the disciples could be deceived.

Equally impossible was it that they could deceive others. They had no possible motive or temptation to attempt it ; but every inducement to the contrary. They had nothing to gain by such a fraud ; while on the other hand they knew that their testimony on this subject would expose them to privations, persecutions, sufferings of every kind, and even to death itself. They were fully aware that by asserting this fact they would arouse the opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees, and all the Jewish rulers, who would use their authority and power to inflict upon them the heaviest punishments. Yet in full view of poverty, disgrace, hardships, toils, and death, they everywhere fearlessly proclaimed this fact. Not only had they nothing to gain by their testimony on this subject, and therefore could have no motive to deceive, but, on the contrary, their interests were on the side of concealment. By merely keeping silence they might have avoided all the sufferings to which bearing testimony exposed them. What, then, but a decided conviction that they were affirming a most important truth, could have induced them to declare the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ? It is not less worthy of notice that they were all united in their testimony. Some of them doubted at first. They all appear to have been slow of belief ; but they had such infallible proofs as removed every doubt. Nor could all their sufferings afterwards, and even death in its most frightful forms, force one of them to doubt, much less deny, this wonderful event.

But again : it is worthy of remark, that the account of the resurrection of Christ was published immediately, and in the very place where the event happened. A long period was not suffered to elapse before this fact was proclaimed, nor was a distinct place chosen in which to make the first report of it. These would have been suspicious circumstances ; but on the contrary, the disciples testify the fact from the day of the resur-

rection itself, and amongst those very persons who had been most active in killing the Prince of Life. Their testimony was given, too, not only before private but also before public persons, before magistrates and tribunals, before philosophers and rabbies, before lawyers expert in examining and cross-examining witnesses, and who would immediately have detected the deception, had there been any disagreement in their testimonies. Yet no person ever pretended to dispute their testimony, or to affirm that they published falsehoods. And so far as we can learn, even the most zealous enemies of Christ, whose interest and inclination would have led them to make every effort to impeach the witnesses, and could have done it with credit to themselves, even they never attempted to disprove the fact that he was risen from the dead. It is true, indeed, that in a state of great excitement, an absurd and ridiculous story was got up and hastily published, that the disciples of Christ had come by night and stolen the body while the guards were asleep; but this story was as hastily abandoned; for it is remarkable that it was never adverted to by the Pharisees in any of those legal processes instituted at Jerusalem against the first preachers of Christ as the risen Messiah, within a few days of the time when the event transpired. First, Peter and John are brought before their grand council (Acts iv. 3); then the whole number of the apostles twice (Acts v. 18); and on these occasions they fearlessly affirmed the fact of the resurrection before the very persons who had originated, and hired the soldiers to publish, the tale of the stealing away of the body. Yet on no occasion did the chief priests oppose this report to the testimony of the disciples, who declared that they had seen and conversed with Jesus after his passion. Their silence may be taken as presumptive evidence that they did not believe this report themselves, and consequently would not

hazard its exposure by referring to it. For if at any time the Roman guards could have been brought forward to disprove the testimony of the apostles, it was when the whole body of the latter were in custody, and before the council; where, indeed, the great question at issue between them was, whether Jesus were risen from the dead or not, and where the only testimony which could be opposed to that of the apostles, was the report of the Roman soldiers. Yet not one of the sixty is brought up; nor is the report which the rulers had bribed them to circulate so much as adverted to. Thus by the positive testimony of his friends, and the silence of his enemies, is proved the fact of the resurrection of Christ.

We might also refer to the proof of the resurrection of Christ afforded by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the subsequent rapid spread of Christianity. This he had foretold to his disciples previous to his crucifixion, and just before his ascension he commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, by receiving the gift of the promised Spirit. Accordingly, at the appointed time, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, this promise was fulfilled by the descent of the Holy Ghost, by whose influences the apostles were endued with various gifts, and qualified for their important work. They were enabled to speak languages which they had never before learned, and to work the most astonishing miracles in the name of Jesus. Hence it is written in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that "with great power," or by the mighty influence of the Spirit which attended their preaching, "gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." The effects of that day were soon extended to every part of the Roman empire, and if there had been doubts in the minds of any concerning this fact, they must

have been removed by the irresistible proof which was given in the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the extraordinary events of that memorable day. Witness also the rapid spread of the Gospel as another, or, rather, a continued, testimony to the truth of this doctrine. The heathen oracles were soon silenced, their temples were shut, their altars thrown down, and Christianity, through the instrumentality of a few illiterate fishermen, triumphed everywhere. They were feeble instruments, it is true, and utterly unable to withstand the force of opposition raised against them. Much less were they able to produce such astonishing effects, but it was the accompanying power of their risen Lord that rendered their labours so abundantly successful. The same argument may be still advanced in proof of the resurrection of Christ.

The conversion of a sinner from the error of his ways is the work of that same Spirit which descended on the day of Pentecost and converted three thousand, and by whose powerful agency the cause of Christianity spread in spite of the opposition of a hostile world. And wherever we see men turned from sin to holiness, we are furnished with an incontestible evidence of this fact. For if the dead in trespasses and sins are raised to spiritual life, it is by the life-giving energy of that Spirit which has been sent into the world, both as a consequence and a proof of the resurrection of Christ. And when we sum up all the evidence afforded us upon this subject, we discover the perfect propriety of the words of the text, and that it is not without the most solid reasons for his belief that St. Paul confidently affirms, and in which affirmation we may also join, "But now is Christ risen from the dead."

We proceed to notice—

II. The importance of this doctrine, as it stands connected with the salvation of mankind, and with the resurrection of the body.

We may here just observe, that Infinite Wisdom never attaches to any subject more importance than its real value demands. It will not, perhaps, for a moment be doubted, that all the circumstances connected with the resurrection of Christ, by which that fact is proved, were ordered and disposed by God himself. And if He has been careful, if we may so speak, to furnish us with all this mass of evidence upon this subject, by which its truth may be placed beyond the possibility of a successful or even attempted contradiction, we must certainly infer, judging from the infallible proofs by which it is supported, that it is of the highest importance in the great system of human redemption. That this inference is correct, a few considerations will clearly show.

1. The importance of this doctrine appears from the fact, that the resurrection of Christ is inseparably connected with all our hopes of salvation. It must be remembered that Jesus Christ came into the world as the predicted Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures. He declared himself to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, and consequently the only sure foundation upon which mankind could safely rest their hopes of present salvation and eternal life. It was on this account that his enemies condemned and crucified him. They called him an impostor, because he called himself the Christ, or Messiah. They brought against him the charge of blasphemy, because he claimed the character of Son of God, making himself equal with God. With these accusations against him, they condemn and put him to the ignominious death of a malefactor. Now the miracle of his resurrection was wrought in attestation of that Divine commission under which he acted ; and as such, it formed an evidence of the most undisputable kind. For if Jesus Christ had been an impostor and blasphemer, as his enemies declared him to be, and for which they

put him to death, the power of God could not consistently have been employed in raising him from the dead, and in thus establishing his false pretensions.

For as it is impossible for God to lie, it is equally impossible for him to work a miracle, the very nature of which would confirm a lie. But the fact that Jesus Christ was raised up by the power of God, proves incontestibly that he was no deceiver, and sets an undeniable seal to the divinity of his nature. Hence the apostle Paul, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, says, that Jesus Christ was "declared" (or proved) "to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." That is, his resurrection from the dead proved that he was the Son of God, as he declared himself to be. And if he is the Son of God, he is no deceiver; and if he is no deceiver, then are all his doctrines true; and if all his doctrines are true, he is the only Saviour of the world; and if the only Saviour of the world, then is he the only foundation of our hopes of salvation. But that he is the Son of God, the fact of his resurrection from the dead fully proves. Consequently this doctrine is inseparably connected with our salvation. Bearing the above consideration in our minds, we will be able more fully to discover the propriety and force of the apostle's declaration in the 17th verse of this chapter, where he says, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." If Christ be not raised, he is a deceiver, for he declared while he was alive that he would rise from the dead; and if he is a deceiver, as would be proved if he be not risen, he is not the Saviour, and your faith in him as the Saviour of the world is vain, he has no power to save you, and you are yet in your sins.

2. But the importance of this doctrine appears further, from

the fact, that it is inseparably connected, not only with our own personal salvation, but also with the whole system of revelation. This we may infer from the 14th verse of this chapter, which reads thus, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." That is, if after all the evidence we have of the resurrection of Christ, evidence too of the highest kind, it can be proved that he is not risen, then as no evidence more positive, or plain, can be afforded us on any of the doctrines of revelation, we may conclude that we have no evidence sufficient to prove the doctrines we preach, and our preaching these doctrines, without sufficient evidence of their truth, is vain, and your faith in them is vain, and cannot save you.

But again : Jesus Christ was the subject of prophecy ; to him gave all the prophets witness ; they declared that he was to be a Divine person, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. These prophecies were fulfilled in Him. But if he be not risen from the dead, he is not the Son of God and the Saviour of the world ; and if he is not the Son of God, then are the prophecies concerning him false, and if the prophecies be false, they were not inspired by God, and cannot consequently be received as a revelation from him.

If one part of the Scriptures be false, the whole is ; for they all bear one general stamp, and must stand or fall together. If we are indeed deceived in respect to the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, we may be deceived in respect to the whole system of revelation ; for it is all intimately connected with this event. If the one is proved, the truth of the other is established as a necessary consequence ; but if the one is not true, neither is the other, for they cannot be separated.

When we thus consider the importance of this doctrine, so intimately connected with the whole system of revelation, and

forming as it were, the key-stone of the arch upon which the great Christian fabric is built, we may discover the wisdom and goodness of God in surrounding it with evidence which proves its truth beyond the power of the most skeptical to falsify; evidence which fully justifies us in making the fearless asser-tion of the text, "But now is Christ risen from the dead;" thus proving that he is the Son of God, and that all he hath spoken concerning himself is true. He is the only and all-sufficient Saviour of the world; he is the sure foundation, and in him we may hope for salvation without any fear of being deceived or disappointed.

3. We notice, lastly, the importance of this doctrine from its connection with the resurrection of the human body from the dead. Jesus Christ, by the resurrection of his body from the tomb, has become the first fruits of them that slept.

There is here an evident allusion to the Jewish custom, established by the ceremonial law, of presenting to the Lord, as a thank offering, the first fruits of all their increase. But there is probably a particular reference to the offering of the sheaf, as between this and the resurrection of Christ there is a more perfect agreement. In respect to the sheaf presented to the Lord as the first ripe fruit of the harvest, there are three particular things to be noticed, viz : 1. It was a proof or pledge of the coming harvest. 2. It was a part of it. 3. It was a perfect specimen of the whole. In all these respects it is a very appropriate figurative representation of the resurrection of Christ as the first-fruits of the final resurrection of all the slumbering dead of the human race.

1. The resurrection of Christ is a proof of the final resurrection of all mankind. The resurrection is here compared to a harvest, of which Christ is the first-fruits, and just so certain as the sheaf was evidence that the harvest was at hand,

equally so is it, that the resurrection of Christ is the proof of ours. If there were no harvest, there could be no first-fruits; and if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. If there were no possibility of the dead rising again from the slumbers of the tomb, then were it impossible that Christ should rise again. But that he has actually risen is fully proved, and thus has he afforded us a positive proof of this general resurrection of which he was but the first-fruit.

2. In the resurrection of Christ we have not only the positive proof of ours, but also, by the same, we are shown the possibility of it. In his human nature he was similar to us. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." "In all things he was made like unto his brethren," possessing their nature with all its *sinless* infirmities and sorrows, and thus, like as the first sheaf of the harvest was a part of the whole, he became a part of our race, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. That soul and body which was similar to ours, were separated. The latter was laid in the tomb, and the former was taken to the place of departed spirits. These were again united, the one to the other in the resurrection state, and joined never more to be separated, were taken up into heaven. Thus in the very proof of our resurrection from the dead, are we shown the possibility of its accomplishment. It is true, indeed, that the body of Christ saw no corruption; the time it lay in the grave was so short, that it did not return to dust and mingle with its native elements, as do the bodies of all mankind; but this does not at all affect the possibility of their actual resurrection. It is a matter of no consequence with the Lord, whether the body has just entered the tomb, and remains yet untouched by corruption, or whether it has lain there a thousand years, and suffered an entire decomposition. In

respect to this great and mysterious work, we may say, that "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day;" and that nothing, which is possibly consistent, is impossible with him.

3. But lastly, in the resurrection of Christ we have a perfect specimen or pattern of ours. Of this we are informed by the words of the text. For as the first-fruits of the harvest were a part, and a perfect sample of the whole, so is the resurrection-body of Christ the perfect pattern of the risen bodies of mankind. He raised our nature from the tomb; he glorified it, and with that nature he ascended into heaven; and there as the Great High Priest of the human family, he waves it before the Lord, presenting with it his own spotless sacrifice, as the slaughtered Lamb of God, which renders it the pleasing first-fruits of the general harvest. Levit. xxiii. 10-12. But we are not to understand from these words that none ever rose from the dead before the resurrection of Christ. Some, indeed, had arisen, but they died again. They were raised to mortality, and could not consequently be examples of the final resurrection of the dead to die no more. Christ was the first who rose to immortality; death hath no more dominion over him, (Rom. vi. 9,) being vanquished by his triumphant and glorious resurrection. Concerning the nature of the body which the saints shall possess in the resurrection-state, we do not design to make any lengthened remarks, though the subject might be pleasing: we merely observe, that as Christ the first-fruit is, so shall they be who are Christ's at his coming. As they have borne the image of the earthly, so they shall hereafter bear the image of the heavenly. This corruptible shall put on incorruption; and this mortal shall put on immortality; and then shall be brought to pass that saying which is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "Raised by

the power of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, the bodies of the saints shall be transformed into a perfect resemblance to the glorified humanity of their incarnate God. Delivered from the power of death and the grave, they shall no more exhibit any remaining traces of weakness, or dishonour, or dissolution, but, arrayed in deathless purity, and spiritual beauty, shall contribute to the perfect felicity of the indwelling spirit, through the duration of a boundless eternity.

In the contemplation of this subject, there is much to establish the fact, and encourage the blessed hope of immortality which every true Christian entertains. In the death of Christ we behold the only acceptable and sufficient sacrifice for sin; and by his resurrection from the dead, we are furnished with an infallible proof that he is the Son of God, and the Saviour of perishing sinners, combining in his mysteriously glorious person, all the attributes necessary to enable him to save them to the uttermost, that believe in him. But the Christian is enabled to look forward beyond the grave, and rejoice in hope of the final deliverance of the body from the bondage of corruption. In the resurrection of his blessed Lord he beholds the pledge and the pattern of his own.

He knows, it is true, that although this mortal body must for a while be the captive of the tomb, yet he has the fullest assurance that when the period appointed for its deliverance shall have arrived, it will burst from its confinement, and rise to glory, honour, and immortality. In confident expectation of a triumphant resurrection from the grave, and the transformation of his body to the likeness of his exalted Redeemer, he can say with the apostle, "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to the working

whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. iii. 20-21. True, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." 1 John iii. 2. Then will all suffering, pain, and disease be ended, and the soul and body, which have been companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus while on earth, shall be re-united, never more to be separated, and translated to a region of pure and holy pleasure, enjoy in communion with the heavenly hosts the fullness of eternal blessedness.

"Thrice blessed, bliss-inspiring hope!"

If such, my brethren, be the high destination of man, through the merits of our crucified and risen Lord, it ought surely to incite us to a holy diligence, that we may be found at his coming, without spot and blameless. And oh! if these bodies are destined to a life of immortality, shall we ever, by neglecting the salvation of our souls, yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin? Nay, rather let us be careful now to yield ourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; that being raised up, and made free from sin, we may have our fruit unto holiness, and hereafter enjoy a glorious resurrection to an immortality of bliss in the everlasting kingdom of our exalted Redeemer.

Observe, too, there shall be a resurrection not only of the just, but also of the unjust. The wicked also shall arise, and however ardently they may wish to remain concealed in the grave of eternal oblivion, the loud sounding trumpet will call them forth from their sleep in the dust. But with what body shall they come? Ah! each shall come with his own body; and those guilty associates in sin shall be joined in eternal union, to complete each other's misery. They shall be raised incorruptible, but that incorruptibility will only render them

capable of an eternity of sorrow. They shall be raised to immortality, but it will be immortality of unmingled woe. Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt. Covered with all the guilt of ten thousand unpardoned crimes, they shall appear in the morning of the resurrection, and from the mouth of the righteous Judge receive their fearful and unalterable doom.

Seeing, then, that we expect such things, what manner of persons ought we to be? The present brief and precarious state of existence gives character to a changeless futurity, and will decide the question, whether we shall arise to everlasting life and honour, or whether we shall come forth from our graves to shame and everlasting contempt. The only means by which we can escape the latter and insure the former, is to seek to be raised from our spiritual death in trespasses and sins, by accepting *now* of the Saviour's grace; and thus having had a part in this resurrection to holiness of heart and life, we shall be saved forever from the power of the second death.

Oh may we all be raised up to newness of life, by the quickening Spirit; and being kept alive by him who is our Living Head, may we at last be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, and so be ever with the Lord, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen!

SERMON XVI.

THE DIGNITY OF THE SAVIOUR.

DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD WITH POWER, ACCORDING TO THE
SPIRIT OF HOLINESS, BY THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

ROMANS i. 4.

THE history of the Redeemer's life is one unbroken series of miraculous events, and in tracing that history from the very morning of creation, when the Saviour was promised to the fallen pair, through the different stages of his mediatorial existence, until his last and triumphant flight to heaven, we find our attention directed to scenes of an altogether unearthly aspect. If we are disposed to ask for evidence to satisfy us of the Divine nature of the Saviour, the artless simplicity of the evangelical record of his life is sufficient to extort from even the most incredulous, as the events of his crucifixion did from the Roman centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Even the celebrated French infidel, Rousseau, speaking of the Gospel, says, "Can he who is the subject of its history be himself a mere man?" Was his the tone of an enthusiast or an ambitious sectarian? What sweetness! What purity in his manners! What an affecting gracefulness in his instructions! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound

wisdom in his discourses ! What presence of mind ! What sagacity and propriety in his answers ! How great the command over his passions ! Where is the man, where is the philosopher who could so live, suffer and die, without weakness and without ostentation ? When Plato described his imaginary good man, covered with all the disgrace of crime, yet worthy of all the rewards of virtue, he described exactly the character of Jesus Christ. The resemblance was so striking, it could not be mistaken, and all the fathers of the Church perceived it. What prepossession, what blindness must it be to compare the son of Sophronius with the son of Mary ? What an immeasurable distance between them ! But from whom of all his countrymen could Jesus have derived that sublime and pure morality of which he only has given us both the precepts and example ? In the midst of the most licentious fanaticism, the voice of the sublimest wisdom was heard, and the simplicity of the most heroic virtue crowned one of the humblest of all the multitude. The death of Socrates, peaceably philosophising with his friends, was the most pleasant that could be desired. That of Jesus, expiring in torments, outraged, execrated, and reviled by a whole nation, was the most horrible that could be feared. Socrates in receiving the cup of poison blessed the weeping executioner who presented it ; but Jesus, in the midst of excruciating torture, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes ! if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God.

The period of his advent to our earth was attended with some of the most remarkable occurrences that mortals had ever witnessed. A company of angels was sent to bear to mankind the tidings of his incarnation. His early appearance in the temple among the doctors of the law, and his extraordinary

wisdom excited their astonishment and wonder. His consecration to the priestly office by his baptism at the river Jordan was attested by a miraculous manifestation from heaven. And the whole period of his public ministry was crowded with events which proved him to be a person of unearthly origin. The lessons of heavenly wisdom which he taught, elicited from his admiring auditors the spontaneous response, "Never man spake like this man." John vii. 47. "And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." Luke iv. 22. He claimed the supreme dominion over all nature, and showed its entire subjection to his control, by performing works which compelled even his enemies to admit that he possessed a power superior to that which belongs to a mere man. But follow him further still, and mark the astonishing events which transpired at his death, and then behold him bursting the barriers of the tomb, to appear again for a little time upon the very scene of his former labours, and you may find in all these circumstances connected with his life, the reasons why the apostle asserts, as he does in the confident language of the text, that Jesus Christ our Lord is "declared," or proved, "to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

The subjects which these words present for our consideration are—

I. The Divine Nature of Christ.

II. The manner in which his Divinity, and consequently his Messiahship, has been proved and established.

I. The divine nature of our Saviour. He is called the Son of God. In entering upon the discussion of this subject, we are forcibly reminded of the declaration of the great apostle to the Gentiles, "Without controversy, great is the mystery

of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." 1 Tim. iii. 16. The incarnation of the Divine Nature is a truth most clearly revealed in the Gospel, although the union in one person of two natures so dissimilar, is a subject which involves a mystery too profound to be fully understood by the human mind. Even the inspired apostle himself could but declare that such was the fact, "God was manifest in the flesh;" but how that union was effected, as it subsisted in the person of Jesus Christ, he did not attempt to explain. But the phraseology employed in the text directs our attention to a subject still higher, and more incomprehensible, if possible, than even the great mystery of the manifestation of God in the likeness of man. The apostle here says that Jesus Christ our Lord is declared to be, not simply God, but the Son of God. This title, by which our Saviour is here called, is understood by some as referring to his human nature, so called to distinguish him from the ordinary descendants of mankind. There is, however, direct testimony in both the Old and New Testaments to prove, that this title does not apply to his human nature, not even in that significant sense in which it is sometimes taken; nor can we apply it to the humanity of Christ, without spoiling the harmony of the Sacred Oracles. Let us suppose for a moment, that the title "Son of God" applies to the human nature of Christ, and what are the consequences which this interpretation involves in respect to the doctrine of the Trinity? We learn from the Scriptures that there are three persons in the Godhead, viz., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, each equal to the other in eternity of existence, power and glory, and these three are one. The Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father, neither is the Holy Ghost the Father, nor the Son; and yet the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. The doctrine of

the Trinity of persons in the Godhead is clearly taught both in the form of baptism, and in the apostolic benediction, and the very same passages of Scripture furnish a strong evidence of the equality of these three persons, and of the unity of their existence.

Now let us remember the title Son is applied to the second person of the Trinity, the very title which is here applied to Jesus Christ.

If then we suppose he is called the Son of God as descriptive of his human nature, we are forced to a conclusion which is absurd in the highest degree. If the Son be one of the persons in the Godhead, and if the human nature of Jesus Christ be the Son of God, then is the human nature of Christ one of the persons in the Trinity. And as these three persons are each divine, therefore the humanity of Christ is divine. But this argument may be given in another form, thus :

The Son, the second person in the Trinity is really and truly God.

But the human nature of Christ is called the Son :

Therefore, the human nature of Christ is God.

Nor is this the only absurdity which the doctrine of the Sonship of the human nature of Christ involves. It not only makes a man one of the persons in the Godhead, but it also very materially affects the immutability of the Divine Nature. For the Divine Being existed previously to the Son, if by the Son we are to understand the humanity of Christ ; and consequently, there was a time when there was no Trinity of persons in the Godhead ; for the Trinity consists of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There must then of necessity have taken place, a change in the Divine Nature, when it became a Trinity of persons at the period of the incarnation of the Deity. But we

are informed that the Divine Nature is incapable of change, without "variableness neither shadow of turning;" "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

The doctrine of the Sonship of the Divine nature of Christ, not only obviates these difficulties, or is free from these absurdities, but it is also in perfect harmony with the testimonies of Inspiration, which should always be the man of our counsel. And however mysterious or incomprehensible it may appear to us, yet if we find it clearly taught in the Sacred Writings, it should be received with unhesitating confidence, though we may not be able fully to comprehend its unsearchable mystery. We shall refer you but to one or two passages of Scripture, in which the doctrine of the Divine, or eternal Sonship of Christ is unequivocally declared. The Apostle John says, "The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of devil." 1 John iii. 8. And again: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. viii. 3. In these passages we can understand the title, Son of God, in no other sense than as applying to the Divine Nature of Christ. For they declare, not that the flesh was the Son of God, but the Son of God, dwelling in the flesh, and thus made manifest, or visible to mankind. It was not this manifestation, or the human nature, that destroyed the works of the devil; but the Son of God who was thus made manifest. But again: John says, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Now, this cannot possibly be applied to the human nature of Christ. For this was written long after his ascension into heaven, and his intercourse with his disciples had ceased. Their fellowship was of a spiritual nature; it was not his

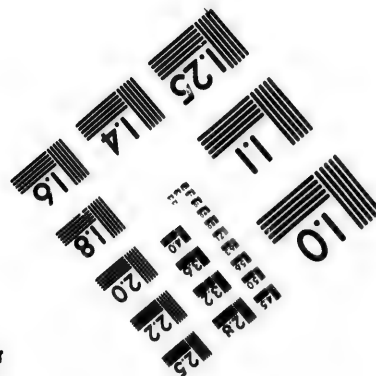
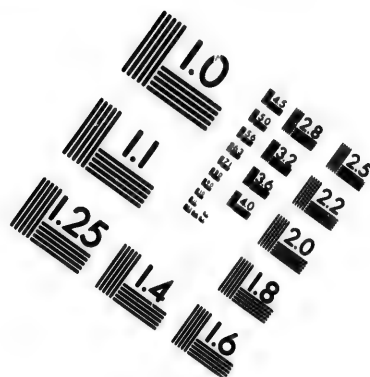
bodily, but his spiritual presence, by his Divine nature they held communion with him. It is in this sense the apostle here calls him the Son of God. And it is very evident that the Jews understood this title, as referring to his Divine, and not to his human nature; for on more than one occasion he excited their fiercest displeasure by calling himself the Son of God, thereby making himself equal with God.

It is true, some suppose that the Divine or eternal Sonship of Christ is a contradiction of terms, and contrary to reason. It is, however, neither contradictory nor unreasonable. It is one of those mysteries which belong to the incomprehensible Supreme; the fact of which is revealed, but the manner of its existence is not explained to us; nor will it ever be, until finite man is able to comprehend the infinite God. Nor is it more difficult for us to receive the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, than that of the eternity, omniscience, or omnipresence of the Father. Neither is it contrary to reason, but both are above the reach of the intellectual powers of man. And, until we are able to soar above all height, and comprehend the Eternal Mind, we are incapable of judging of the nature of a mysterious truth, which Infinite Wisdom has seen proper to reveal.

II. The second part of this subject leads us to consider the manner in which the divinity of Christ has been set forth or declared. The apostle here says, it was "declared," marked out, or clearly defined, as the original word signifies, "with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Whatever interpretations may have been given of this passage by different persons, there is one sense in which it is to be understood, which cannot be disputed. It does undoubtedly teach the important truth, that the resurrection of Christ





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from the dead establishes, or proves the Divinity of his Nature, and most fully invests him with all the attributes of the character which he professed to bear.

His resurrection then is to be viewed as a declaration of his divinity, or the seal of heaven of his Messiahship. It is true that the resurrection of his human body from the grave, simply considered, cannot be regarded as an incontestible proof of his divinity, especially as we are informed that his resurrection is not the only one that has ever taken place. It is, indeed, the only one of the *kind*, and, when considered in connection with its attendant circumstances, it furnishes undeniable evidence of his Supreme Divinity. It must be remembered, in order to a proper understanding of this subject, that the Saviour died upon the cross, not merely as a willing victim of sacrifice to atone for our sins; but also, as a martyr to the truths which he taught, and more especially, to the character he claimed for himself. In this light, his death was regarded by his own unbelieving countrymen. The prophet Isaiah says, that they, his own nation, did not understand the purpose of the Messiah's sufferings; for when he was bearing our griefs, and carrying our sorrows, "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." Even when he was bearing in his own body the punishment due to our sins, we regarded him as an object of the Divine displeasure, and suffering for his own transgressions, Isaiah liii. 4. The crimes with which he was charged, and under the pretence of which he was crucified, were blasphemy and imposture; for claiming the character of the predicted Messiah, and for making himself equal with God; or rather, making himself God. The miracles he had wrought, had not only failed to convince his enemies, but had even tended to excite their malice and ingenuity to devise means to procure his condemnation and death. A mock trial

was instituted, and the charges preferred were proved, not by credible witnesses, but by the vociferations of an excited populace, and under the semblance of justice, he was doomed to die as a malefactor, guilty of a capital offence. Now, his resurrection from the dead, did not merely falsify the charges under which he suffered, and prove his innocence; it was also a fulfillment of his own predictions, and a demonstration that as God, and King of universal nature, neither the chains of death, nor the strong barriers of the tomb could withstand his almighty power. The triumph of the tyrant of the grave, over the body of the Saviour was but short. Scarcely had he seized his prey and began to celebrate his mighty achievement, than the prize of his victory is wrested from his grasp by the omnipotent arm of the universal Conquerer. A sealed and well guarded sepulchre could oppose no effectual resistance to his progress. He marched in triumph through the dominions of the king of terrors, and, having spoiled principalities and powers, he appeared again amidst the very scenes of his former labour and suffering. Hence we are to regard his resurrection not merely as the pattern and pledge of ours, but also as the incontestible evidence, or the demonstration of his real divinity and Messiahship. In this light the resurrection of Christ is viewed by the apostle Paul, when he says, Christ "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification : " That is, by his resurrection we are furnished with the most satisfactory proof that he is the Son of God, and the Saviour of mankind, and we are thus enabled to exercise that faith in him which justifies the ungodly.

But our attention is here directed, not merely to the simple fact of his resurrection, but also to the signs and wonders with which that important event was connected. This declaration of his divinity was accompanied with the most significant

manifestations of his almighty power. Nor need we refer to the numerous miracles he performed during his public ministry for facts to illustrate the text. Let us go, for a moment, and contemplate the scenes which transpired in immediate connection with the closing period of his mediatorial work on earth. Mark attentively the wonderful tokens of some unearthly transaction which occurred at the time of his crucifixion. Nature spoke, and gave her testimony to his power. The rending vail of the temple, and the quaking rocks, and the opened graves proclaimed his universal sovereignty over nature, grace, and the invisible world. So significant were the displays of his power amidst these awful scenes, that the centurion and those who were watching at his cross, were compelled, as if by an impulse they could not resist, to confess, "Truly, this was the Son of God;" and thus to counteract the very purpose they were appointed to uphold.

Even when to all human appearance the efforts of his enemies to prove him a deceiver had completely succeeded, his almighty power was so triumphantly displayed as to carry terror to the very hearts of his adversaries. But mark further, what transpired when he rose from the grave. He rose not alone. His resurrection power was felt by many who had long been sleeping in the dust. Death was led captive by the conquering Redeemer, and from the dominions of the king of terrors he brought forth the witnesses of his life-giving power. His voice was heard in graves undisturbed by long repose, and at his bidding the bodies of many of the saints re-appeared amidst the scenes of their former life, to testify that he was indeed the resurrection and the life.

There is another manifestation of his power, in connexion with his resurrection, which is, perhaps, but seldom noticed, though it affords a very striking proof of his absolute dominion over the hearts of men.

It must be remembered that the death of Christ was not that of an obscure individual, by the hand of the midnight assassin. It was the death of one who had become famous for his public deeds ; and it was accomplished under the sanction, and by the command of the highest civil authority of the nation. He died as a malefactor, charged with crimes which, according to the laws, required the sacrifice of life. The majesty of the law, and the honour of the government were concerned in his case. More than this, the purposes of covetous and aspiring men were also intimately connected with the death of Christ, and to the chief priests and Pharisees especially this was an object of the most intense interest. They accordingly took every precaution, and employed every possible means to secure the object of their desire, viz: the entire overthrow of the Saviour's cause. Why, then, was it, that after his resurrection, no attempt was ever made to arrest him a second time? They knew that he was alive again. The soldiers who were set to guard his sepulchre had assured them of this ; they could not but have known that he was, as formerly, associating with his disciples. Yet, no effort was made to seize him again and put him to death.

He continued on earth for the space of forty days, in the very midst of his enemies and murderers, and although but a few days before he had been the object of national interest, and of judicial proceedings, now that he is risen from the dead he continues to perform without opposition or harm the work he came to accomplish. Why was he not immediately seized and dragged to the cross by his enemies, who were still reeking in his blood? It was because their day of guilty triumph was past, and the omnipotent arm of the Almighty Saviour held them in check. Thus, by the exercise of his power, he declared his supreme divinity and, the absolute sway which he, as Lord

of all, exercises over all mankind. The wrath of man was restrained. Since his resurrection from the dead covered his enemies with shame and the deepest disgrace, in witnessing the entire defeat of their cause, we might have supposed they would have been driven to desperation, and to a more determined effort to secure his death. Yet with every inducement to make a second attempt, to sustain the dignity of their highest tribunal, to vindicate their own characters, and to secure the triumph of their own cause over that of Christ, not even a voice was raised against him; the clamorous rabble are silent; the council that was convened immediately after the report of his resurrection, did not even discuss the propriety of sending a band of soldiers to bring him again before the judgment seat. Why this silence? Why did they then quietly submit to suffer the disgrace of so signal a defeat? There was an invisible power which they could not resist, and although their honour and interest were involved, they were compelled to submit to their fate, and Jesus in triumph walks unmolested in the very midst of those who but a few days before were sporting themselves with his dying sufferings. Surely in all this there was a manifestation of power that declared most distinctly the divinity of the Saviour.

We may notice further, the wonderful effects that followed the event of his resurrection. The memorable scenes at Pentecost, and the subsequent rapid spread and triumphs of the Gospel, displayed the divinity and almighty power of its author. What but the might of Him who rules the hosts of heaven, and holds the powers of hell in chains, could have produced such astonishing effects by the use of means, or instruments, apparently so inadequate to the task? Twelve men contended against the combined hostility of earth and hell!

Twelve obscure and unlearned men were employed to over-

throw the religion of empires, and to attack and uproot the superstitions of a long succession of ages. How preposterous the enterprise—they succeeded! Nay more, they triumphed. Idols fell from their seats; thrones trembled at their approach, and empires were shaken to their very centre. “The wilderness and the solitary place” were “glad for them, and the desert” rejoiced and blossomed “as the rose.” The streams of salvation fertilized the moral wastes, and transformed them from the dreariness of a wintry desolation to the blooming beauty of a perpetual spring. Here then was a manifestation of power which attested that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. And every subsequent age of the Gospel dispensation has been marked with similar evidences of the Sonship or the divinity of Christ. And why is it that in this our day, through the preaching of the Gospel, sinners are awakened from their guilty slumbers and saved from their sins? It is because he who was dead lives again, and is exalted a prince and a Saviour, with power to save his people from their sins. Whenever we witness the conversion of a sinner from the error of his ways, or the final salvation of a believer, there we have a declaration of the divinity of Him who is the foundation of our hope of salvation—a declaration which has been repeated, and is continuing to be repeated in the wide-spreading, and multiplying triumphs of the Redeemer’s Cross. Onwards still shall these triumphs continue to roll, until the earth shall be encircled with the universal anthem, “Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!”

“According to the spirit of holiness.” By this we are doubtless to understand, that all the events connected with the incarnation of the Son of God took place according to the predictions made by the prophets under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. They had foretold not only his coming, but also

the wonderful works he would perform. The miracles which he wrought, while they declared his divine power, were at the same time a fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah; thus affording the strongest evidence of his divinity. In him every prophetic enunciation of the Holy Spirit received its accomplishment. Hence the declaration, that he is the Son of God, with the demonstrations of his power, as seen in the mighty works he performed; and all in exact accordance with the revelations of the Spirit of Holiness, which foretold these works, and by whose agency they were performed.

Under these circumstances, this Saviour is set forth as the object of our faith, and the only foundation of our hope of salvation. "Believe" on Him, and "thou shalt be saved." Build on this foundation, and thou shalt never be confounded.*

SERMON XVII.

PAUL'S SERMON BEFORE FELIX.

AND AS HE REASONED OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, TEMPERANCE, AND JUDGMENT TO COME, FELIX TREMBLED.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

PERHAPS no man was ever more happily successful in the selection of his subject than was the apostle Paul, when he preached before Felix. So far was he from shrinking from the profession of his faith in the presence of the governor of Judea, and those of his court, by whom he was surrounded, that he boldly proclaims the doctrines of Christianity, and dwells at length upon three principal topics which had a special application to the character of Felix, the judge before whom he then stood arraigned upon an accusation of sedition and heresy. Conscious of his own innocence, and fully aware of the malicious designs of his accusers, he was nothing intimidated from the open avowal of his faith in Christ, by the circumstances of apparent danger in which he was placed. On the contrary, he seemed rather to gather fresh courage from the very position he occupied, and all the powers of his giant mind were called into action in the discussion of subjects which he knew from their very nature must have a special

influence upon Felix, and would either excite his displeasure, or alarm and terrify his guilty soul. So fully was the apostle impressed with the grandeur of his mission, and the glorious truths he was called to preach, that he forgot the majesty of Felix. Nay he did more. He made even the governor forget himself, and feel as though he were a criminal at the bar, instead of a judge upon the throne. He made him receive admonition with reverence, while "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come; and the overwhelming impression he felt of the awful importance of these subjects raised him far above the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed, and rendered him insensible to the emotions of fear and shame, or a desire for human applause. Standing before Felix and Drusilla, he preached upon "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." Felix was covetous, luxurious, and governor of Judea, and Paul selected three subjects corresponding to these characteristics. In reasoning upon righteousness, he showed the meanness of his avaricious desires. Upon temperance, he showed its debasing and ruinous effects; and addressing the governor of Judea, as one of those persons who are apt to think themselves responsible to none, he treated of that higher tribunal to which all are held accountable.

We have here—

I. The subjects of the apostle's preaching before Felix; viz.: Righteousness, Temperance, and a Judgment to come.

II. The effect produced by his sermon: Felix trembled.

I. The first topic of the apostle's discourse was righteousness. It is said in the verse preceding the text, that Felix sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. The doctrines of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God ever formed the subject of his ministry; wherever he went, Christ

crucified was the end of his conversation ; and in the discussion of the doctrines of salvation through faith in Christ, the subject of righteousness would, of necessity, come under consideration, and he would be led to view it both in reference to the character of God, and its manifestation in the economy of his moral government, and also in its application to man, as furnishing him with the rules by which he is required to be governed in all his actions. In reasoning upon this subject, he had an ample range for the full exercise of all the powers of his mighty mind. He might have shown, as no doubt he did, the righteousness or justice of God, as that attribute of the Divine nature is most strikingly displayed in the history of the world, but more especially so in the stupendous and amazing scheme of human redemption. There might be seen an unequivocal manifestation of the justice of God, and a most solemn declaration that no one of the regulations of his moral government can be infringed with impunity, and that not a single claim of his righteous law can either be relinquished or lowered in its demands. The doctrine of Christ crucified furnished him with the most impressive and incontestible evidence, that the Divine Being will never swerve from those principles of righteousness upon which his moral government is based ; that he will not suffer those principles to be violated without most rigorously exacting a sufficient atonement. He might show, too, that when man had transgressed the law of God, no less a sacrifice than the only begotten Son of God was sufficient to meet the demands of justice, and to save the guilty transgressor from suffering the penalty of his crime.

Now, reasoning from this display of the righteousness of God, he might infer that, as He is " holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works," he will be equally strict in requiring of all his creatures to be governed by the same : that he

does most certainly enjoin upon all mankind the most rigid observance of all his righteous and holy commandments; and in treating upon righteousness as the rule of human actions, he brought his subject to a practical bearing upon the conduct of his imperial auditor, and compelled him to hear truths, which contained, not only severe reproof of his past misdeeds, but also taught him what he might expect would be the future consequences of his conduct, should he persist in his course of iniquity. Here he might have taught him that the laws of God require princes and rulers to be just, and rule in the fear of God; that governors are to regard the interests of their people; to administer equal justice to all; to maintain the rights of the widow and the orphan; and that in all their actions, they are to be influenced by the purest motives, and guided by the strictest integrity. Here, too, he might enforce that rule which is laid down by both the law and the prophets: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." In reasoning upon righteousness, he might also have shown, that however the wicked may seem to prosper for a time, and to escape a just retribution for their crimes; yet, that injustice will most certainly, at the last, meet with its appropriate reward; and that however much men may suppose they gain by fraud, or violence, the day of calamitous visitation will finally overtake them.

But further, in treating upon this subject, he might have dwelt upon the doctrine of man's depravity, and preached to Felix that every man is guilty in the sight of God, under the sentence of condemnation, and exposed to eternal misery and hell, and that he must obtain forgiveness through faith in Christ, and be justified, or made righteous before God, abstain from all appearances of evil, and lead a holy life in all godliness and honesty, or else be punished with the bitter pains of eternal death.

II. The second topic of his discourse was temperance. He reasoned upon temperance ; and we may very naturally suppose that in treating upon this subject he would show the degrading, and ruinous effects of a licentious indulgence ; how infinitely it is beneath the dignity of an intelligent and rational being, and especially of one placed in a highly important and honourable situation, to yield himself up to the dominion of the basest passions, and thus to degrade himself below the level of the brutes, and render himself unworthy the name of a man. He would demonstrate its effects, and show how intemperance blasts the brightest earthly prospects, and casts a foul stain upon the once fair character of those who yield themselves up to its influence ; how it renders the strongest minds incapable of intelligent reflection ; weakens and destroys the understanding, perverts the heart, produces disease, temporal misery, and discord in society ; how it destroys the health, and ruins the soul.

He might show Felix that his intemperate lust for ungodly gain would, if indulged, prove his ruin ; that to the same cause might be attributed the vast majority of the evils that afflicted the human family ; the contentions and wars being mostly caused by the intemperate desire for power, fame, or riches. He might show the certain consequences of intemperance even when considered in its physical effects, or as the mere violation of the laws of man's nature, and prove conclusively that all irregularities, and the gratification of unlawful desires, must of necessity prove injurious in the end, and that the inordinate pursuit of present pleasures cannot be purchased but at the alarming price of future pain and bitter remorse.

But in reasoning on temperance, he has, no doubt, appealed to the authority of the word of God, and set forth in the most forcible manner the requirements of the unerring rule of

human conduct. By this he would lay an axe at the very root of this evil, and show that the Gospel prohibits not only the unrestrained indulgence of our appetites and propensities, but it even forbids the cherishing of an impure desire, enjoins the mortification of the lusts of the flesh, and the practice of the most rigid self-denial. From this standard he might also show that we are forbidden to desire or seek the things of this world, excepting so far as they can be rendered subservient to the great purpose of our being, the present and everlasting salvation of the soul; and that if we suffer ourselves to be governed by an all-absorbing concern for worldly pleasures and riches, we will most certainly fall into many foolish and hurtful snares, and receive as the only permanent reward of our labour, a miserable perdition of everlasting sorrows.

III. The last subject of his sermon was a "judgment to come." And here the overwhelming eloquence of the apostle borrowed its inspiration from the awful grandeur and solemnity of his theme, and made him forgetful of everything but the great work to which he was called.

He reasoned upon a judgment to come. He would prove the necessity of a future judgment, both for the purpose of developing the mysteries of Divine Providence, and justifying the ways of God with man. He might argue the necessity of a future judgment from the very circumstances in which he was then placed, to vindicate his own innocence, and to bring to light the dark and murderous designs of his accusers.

He not only reasoned upon the necessity of a judgment to come, but he also proved the certainty of such an event, from the infallible declarations of the Word of God, which assure us that he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and render to each according to his works, whether good or bad.

In reasoning upon a judgment to come, we may very reasonably suppose that he described its solemn grandeur and its important results. He spoke of the end of time, the sounding of the Great Archangel's trumpet, and the dead, small and great, rising from their sleep in the dust, and advancing from every quarter to the scene of their final trial, to hear from the Supreme Judge the sentence of their everlasting destiny.

There would be found the rich man and Lazarus ; kings and subjects ; Felix, the favourite of Cæsar, and Paul the prisoner of Felix ; but they would be found there without any of those names, titles, or distinctions by which they were known on earth, and which often concealed their true character. There every man would receive his proper reward, according to a just estimate of his moral worth.

He reasoned of a judgment to come, of a day of trial, when not only the actions of all mankind shall come under review, but even the secrets of the hearts shall be published to an assembled and listening world. He would also doubtlessly show, that in the decisions of that awful day, many will be most fearfully disappointed ; many who suppose from the prosperity they enjoyed in this world, that they were the favourites of God, and secure of heaven, will be surprised, beyond measure, to find themselves placed at the left hand, doomed to the miseries of a lost eternity. They said " Lord ! Lord !" on earth, and perhaps had the outward form of godliness ; but notwithstanding all their profession, when weighed in the balance, they are found wanting. O ! could we have listened to this great apostle, while dwelling upon this awful subject, we might have heard him describing the events of that day, and in the most glowing language portraying to our view, the dead, rising at the trumpet's call ; the Judge descending, accompanied with myriads of the hosts of heaven ; the opening of the books ;

the joy of the righteous ; the terror and alarm of the wicked ; kings and mighty men, and chief captains, and bondmen, and freemen, saying to the " mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb : " the judgment closing, the righteous marching up to glory, and the wicked sent away into everlasting punishment.

These were some of the subjects upon which he dwelt in his sermon before the governor of Judea. These truths he preached with such boldness, even in the face of danger, and with an eloquence so irresistibly powerful, as to alarm the governor, and fill him with the most fearful apprehensions.

II. Felix trembled. Here we are informed what was the effect of this sermon. Paul's word was " with power."

How extraordinary the scene here described, and how unlike those we are accustomed to behold on such occasions ! Go with me for a little to yonder hall of justice, and what would you expect to witness ? The tribunal set, the prisoner arraigned before the judge, and shivering with guilty fear, while the witnesses testify of his crimes, and complete the evidence of his guilt ! But behold the strange reverse. The prisoner arraigned for trial, with all the boldness which innocence and truth can inspire, stands in the presence of the judge, and fearlessly proclaims those very doctrines for which his accusers were seeking his condemnation, and reasons upon them with such clearness, and applies them to the conscience with such power, as to cause even the judge to tremble, and every accuser to stop his mouth in confusion and shame. Such was the scene that transpired when Paul was brought before Felix. While the apostle preached, Felix felt indescribable emotions of mind. The subjects of the sermon, the vivid recollection of his past iniquitous practices, now set in order before

his eyes ; his present sins, Drusilla, the object of his passion, and the object of his crime, and the courage of St. Paul, all tended to increase the terror of his guilty soul. His heart sunk within him, while that servant of Jesus Christ expounded and applied the truths of the Scriptures. The word of God which he preached was quick and powerful, and the apostle armed with this invincible weapon was more than a match for all his foes. Every stroke of this two-edged sword carried conviction to the heart. Every conclusion of the apostle's arguments served to deepen the conviction in the mind of Felix, until he is induced to request the prisoner to withdraw from his presence. Behold here, then, the majesty of innocence, and the meanness of guilt ! A governor and judge, surrounded by his court, trembling in the presence of a friendless prisoner at his bar, over whom he had the power of life and death.

We shall find the reason of the fears of Felix in the subjects of the apostle's sermon, which, like a faithful mirror, gave him a correct and clear discovery of his own deformities, set his sins before him in the light of noon-day, and revealed the shameful secrets of his vice. It was not merely the boldness of Paul, his eloquence, or the conclusiveness and irresistible force of his arguments, that so affected Felix. He might have wrapped himself up in his coat of mail and remained invulnerable to all this. There was an invisible power attending the truths preached by the apostle, which he could not resist. That was the power of the Holy Ghost, and he was compelled to feel whether he would or not. It was the light of heaven, dispelling the darkness of his mind, which gave him a discovery of his true character. It was the living energy of Gospel truth applied to his conscience, that alarmed his fears, and made him tremble in view of the consequences of his conduct from the retributions of a righteous Jehovah.

We are not going to sit in judgment upon Felix. His case, in common with all others, will come up in order at the proper tribunal. We may, however, remark that his fears were not groundless, nor did he tremble without a sufficient cause. It was no fiction of the imagination that terrified his soul; but sober, tangible, and eternal realities.

The requirements of God's righteous law had been enforced in his hearing; that law which commands all to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God; and the doom of the unrighteous, had been most solemnly declared. He knew that he had lived in utter disregard of all its requirements, and violated every principle of justice, and was even at that moment retaining an innocent man in bondage, in hope of obtaining an unrighteous reward for his release.

He had heard, too, in the apostle's sermon, the broad and strict demands of temperance discussed, nor did he find himself less guilty in this respect. He had given a loose rein to every desire of his soul. He knew he had been guilty of severing the most sacred ties, in order to gratify his intemperate ardour for sensual pleasures, and had given himself up to the unrestrained dominion of all the evil propensities of his nature. Why, then, should he not feel when he hears a most vivid and alarming description of the meanness, the criminality, and the ruinous consequences, of his misconduct?

But above all, it was the idea of a judgment to come that supplied the lack of every other terrifying motive, and imparted a redoubled energy to those fears which, like the heavings of a Vesuvic eruption, were agitating his soul. O! to have the history of his life of cruelty and shame published to an assembled universe, and to be seen by others as he saw himself, was a thought which, even a conscience seared by a long course of crime, could not but feel was full of terror. But in

addition to this, the certainty of receiving a just recompense of reward as the inevitable consequence of a life of sin, and to hear from the mouth of the judge the unalterable decision of that tribunal from which there will be no appeal, extinguished the last ray of his flattering hopes, and gave him the most fearful forebodings of the nature of his final doom.

But, my friends, we do not preach from this subject merely for the purpose of commending the courage and faithfulness of Paul, or condemning the conduct of Felix. With neither of these persons have we any concern, only so far as we can derive lessons of profitable instruction from their example. Our aim is to preach to you concerning the faith in Christ; and in preaching this doctrine, to enforce the claims and requirements of righteousness; to incite you to the practice of that self-denying temperance which the gospel enjoins, and to keep you in continual remembrance of the certainty of a future judgment. We may still reason upon the awful certainty of a judgment to come. And if in reasoning upon these subjects you sometimes feel as did Felix, yet are we not to hold our peace until you are persuaded to forsake your evil ways, and yield obedience to the laws of God. Do you feel disposed to complain when we condemn your vices, and interfere with your peaceable enjoyment of unlawful pleasures? Consider the Apostle Paul. He is the model set before us. We are required to speak with freedom and force; to rebuke and exhort in season and out of season; to proclaim the threatenings of Jehovah, and endeavour to disturb that fatal security which the sinner wishes to enjoy in the commission of crimes. We point you to the solemn realities of a judgment to come; and beseech you by every argument and every motive, to be reconciled to God while he offers you the conditions of peace. May you all be prepared to meet him in judgment, and live with him in heaven, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen!

SERMON XVIII.

THE THREE-FOLD DELUSION.

GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON,
I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

ACTS XXIV. 25.

Perhaps a more striking instance of the perverting influence, and the delusive nature, of sin cannot be found than the one recorded in the text. In these few words of the text we have three grand mistakes, rising in absurdity one above the other in a regular climax, until arriving at the last, and most absurd and ruinous in its tendency of all, it is rendered complete. Hence this subject may very properly be called the three-fold and fatal delusion. It is one not peculiar to Felix alone; but one which is repeated, if not by the lips, yet more expressively still, in the conduct of every impenitent sinner who is delaying the work of repentance, with the supposed intention of performing it at some future period.

I. The first error contained in these words of Felix, is the supposition that he was certain of any other time than the present. "Go thy way for this time;" implying that he would have other opportunities when he could consider this subject more fully, and attend to it at his leisure. This, perhaps, is one of the

most common errors of mankind. "All men think all men mortal but themselves." The present time is always with them regarded as an earnest, or a pledge, of the future. They think because they are alive to day they will surely be so to-morrow. The language of their hearts, as well as of their conduct is, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." The ten thousand evidences which continually unite their voices in testifying to them that human life is short at the longest, and uncertain in its continuance; that so exceedingly frail is the tenement which contains the living spirit, that it is liable to be broken to shivers at any moment. Yet all this is not sufficient to convince them that the expectation of many days yet to come, which they entertain with so much confidence, is without any assurance from the Great Disposer of human life, who has appointed the bounds of their existence, which they cannot pass. They see many dying around them, some in the bloom of youth, and others in the full strength and vigour of manhood, suddenly removed from the height of activity in the busy scenes of life, to the careless repose of the grave. Although these events should convince them that in the midst of life they are in death; yet they look upon these instances of the mortality of others as evidences of their own security from a like summons, rather than as certain tokens that they, too, may wither and fall by a blast equally as sudden and unexpected. If the necessity of an immediate attention to the concerns of the soul is impressed upon their minds, the deceitfulness of the heart suggests the flattering idea, that the tide of life is yet flowing on with as full and strong a current as ever, without a shadow, or the slightest symptoms of decrease; and they say, "Go thy way for *this* time. We cannot think of breaking up all the associations we have formed, and relinquishing all at once our fond pursuits of

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worldly pleasure, especially as we may retain them for a longer space without any serious risk, seeing that our prospects of many future opportunities are fair, and wear the aspect of almost absolute certainty."

But where can any pledge be found to justify such expectations? Surely not in the word of God. It everywhere teaches us the necessity of improving the present time if we would secure the great object of our life. It declares that now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation. It most solemnly cautions us against admitting into our calculations any future time, even what may appear to us so near, and so certain as to-morrow. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Prov. xxvii. 1. We are taught to look upon ourselves as mere tenants at will, who may be removed at the pleasure of the Great Proprietor, without a moment's previous warning. Hear what he himself says: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matt. xxiv. 42, 44. That is, because I have not told you how early I may come, or how late I may tarry, and have given you no encouragement whatever to place any dependence upon any future time; be ye always ready, always improving your time as though you were assured that everlasting consequences were involved in each moment of your earthly existence. How great then is the mistake implied in the request of Felix, "Go thy way for this time." How many who have repeated this saying, supposing themselves sure of other seasons of mercy, have had their golden dreams of future opportunities dissipated by the sudden and unexpected summons, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee!"

II. The second error involved in the text is founded upon

the first, and rising above it in absurdity. He spoke as though he were certain of another time, and he supposed that some future time would be more favourable for this purpose than the present. Or in other words, he thought an uncertainty better than a certainty. "When I have a convenient season," said he; "the present is not a convenient season; but I expect that such a season will come." Poor deluded Felix! Equally the objects of compassion are you who are the infatuated followers of his example. You are risking an eternity of heavenly glory upon the baseless fabric of your disordered vision: *a convenient season*. Let us now see whether there is, or will be, any convenient season for sinners to seek religion, or whether the idea be not a mere persuasion of the deceitful heart.

We are continually the subjects of delusion, and perhaps in no respect more so, than from the sense of sight. We do not see the objects of nature by which we are surrounded, as they really are; but according to the position they occupy we form more or less erroneous opinions concerning them.

It is one of the laws of our vision, that objects near at hand appear large, or in full size, and they diminish in their apparent magnitude in proportion to the distance; and hence the more remote the object, the smaller it appears to be, until at a certain distance everything diminishes to a point, and beyond which no objects can be seen. This is termed by artists, "*the vanishing point*." This, however, is all but a mere appearance and not reality. The objects which we see at a distance, and which seem to be quite small, may really be much larger than those near to us, and there may be objects beyond the reach of our vision of much greater magnitude than any we see.

Now every person who is living without God in the world, sees everything in perspective; that is, the obstacles which

appear in the way of seeking religion now appear to be much greater than they will be at any future time, and they diminish as he looks forward until he imagines he sees a period when every obstacle will be removed, or at least will become so insignificant as not to prevent him from obtaining salvation without any serious difficulty, and that time he thinks will be his convenient season, or it may be called in scientific language, the vanishing point in the range of the sinner's vision. The present is never a convenient season. He looks round and he sees insurmountable obstacles in the way of seeking religion now; it is positively the most unfavourable time that the subject could have been mentioned to him. The hurry of business, and the pressing wants of his family, and the claims of his friends upon his attention, all render it utterly impracticable for him to attend to this subject now. But he looks forward, and he thinks that no such obstacles will stand in his way at *any* future time. Every difficulty seems to him to diminish in proportion to its distance, and finally to vanish altogether. Thence from this delusive appearance he supposes that next week, next month, or next year, he will be able to seek religion without making any sacrifice of feeling or worldly interest. But this is all a gross delusion, nor will the period ever arrive which the sinner will regard as a convenient season to seek religion. He may think that six months hence there will be nothing to prevent, but when that time comes, he will find how much he is mistaken. So far from the obstacles lessening by delay, they will be continually increasing, and the convenient season, instead of drawing nearer, will every day appear at a greater distance. For example: let a person look before him as far as the eye can reach, and according to the law of vision, to which we have already referred, everything grows smaller in appearance, until the farthest limit of sight ends in

a point, and he may suppose that all beyond is a perfect blank. But let him now advance towards that point, and the objects which at a distance appeared quite small, increase in magnitude as he approaches them. New objects continually arise in his view, even where he supposed that nothing existed ; and proceed as far as he may, the point beyond which nothing was supposed to exist will be continually receding before him, nor will he ever be able to overtake it. It is just so with every person who waits for a convenient season in which to seek religion—he waits for an imaginary time which will never arrive.

We may here inquire for a moment, what is necessary to render any season convenient ? We will suppose first that it is necessary there should be no obstacles in the way. The reason why the present is not convenient, is because everything is in the way. Not even the shadow of an appearance would seem to justify the commencement of this work. O, no, it is impossible to think of attending to it now. I am utterly unprepared to entertain even a serious thought of it at present. Should I seek religion now, it would blast all my worldly expectations. I wish to make a close bargain and get another farm. I intend to cheat some persons out of a few hundred pounds, or I am engaged in a profitable business which is not strictly honest, and I cannot think of giving up my employment yet, until I have acquired sufficient for my future support. Or, perhaps, some sinful pleasure or amusement ; a few more balls, or turns at the gaming table, or a few more glasses of the inebriating liquid must be enjoyed before it will be a convenient season. But if the sinner waits for every obstacle to be removed, before he commences the work of seeking salvation, he will never commence at all. For the longer he delays, the more numerous and difficult to be surmounted

are the obstacles which appear in his way. The cares of the world are continually multiplying upon him ; his affection for sinful pleasures grows stronger and stronger ; he feels an increasing disinclination to think of that which concerns his salvation, and is more and more disposed to put further and further away the day of repentance. 'There is, there can be, no such thing as this "convenient season." There never will be a time when he will think he has leisure, or can so far relax his other pursuits as to attend to the one thing needful. It must be done at an inconvenient season, or it will never be done at all. Felix, therefore, in saying that he would put off this important work until he should have a convenient season, did in reality say, that he would never attend to it. We sometimes hear it remarked in respect to the case of Felix, that this "convenient season" never came. Surely not. There is no such thing. It is all a delusion, as really so as the vanishing point which deceives our organ of sight. If the great adversary of mankind can only persuade men to delay repentance until what they suppose will be a "convenient season," he knows that such a time will never come, and they will be lost forever ; and, consequently, those who yield to such a temptation render their salvation utterly impossible.

III. But the last error implied in these words is the most absurd of all. "I will call for thee." Let us examine this for a moment and see if, as the cap of a climax, it does not at the same time give a finishing stroke to a picture of the human heart, which portrays its deceitfulness in most fearful colours. "I will call for thee." We can hardly believe that Felix sincerely meant what he said. Perhaps he did. Perhaps he did intend at some future period to hear Paul on this subject again. But how unlikely was it that he would ever do so ! He had sent for him once to hear him concerning his faith in

Christ, but a scene had transpired in the judgment hall which he little expected. The apostle's sermon had taken such a hold upon his feelings, and so alarmed his guilty conscience, that he was under the necessity of interrupting him in his discourse, and requesting him to withdraw from his presence, lest his awakened and terrified conscience should force him to a confession of his crimes. St. Paul was the last man he would ever send for. He had heard him preach once, and that was quite sufficient for him. He would rather send for Tertullus, and hear him say, "Most noble Felix," and listen to his flatteries and praises, than to hear the Apostle "reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." Or he would rather hear the orator's accusations against Paul, than the preacher expose his sins, and condemn his ungodly practices. Can we believe that there was even the shadow of a probability that he would wish ever to hear the Apostle again? No, he would never have a convenient season for this purpose; never see a time when he would wish to shiver with guilty fear in the presence of a prisoner reasoning so powerfully, and deducing such alarming conclusions as the Apostle had done. He would never find a season when he would wish to be disturbed in the enjoyment of his sensual pleasures, by listening to another sermon from St. Paul; and had he been aware of the unpleasant effects which the former would produce, we will venture to affirm, that he would not have sent for him even then. How unreasonable the supposition, that he would deliberately wish to hear a man preach the second time, and upon the very same subject too, when he had felt so miserable under his first sermon, that he was under the necessity of stopping him before the conclusion of his discourse. Nor *did* he ever send for him again for this purpose. He conversed with him frequently afterwards, hoping to get money for his release; but he never requested

him to reason again of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." And there was no possibility that he would call for him; for it was repugnant to every feeling of his fallen soul, and it was the climax of absurdity for him to suppose for a moment that he would ever do so.

Felix, however, is not the only person who has fallen into the gross and ruinous error of supposing that he would of his own accord, at some future time, commence the work of seeking the salvation of his soul. This mistake of Felix was the production of the deceitful heart; and it is common to every child of fallen man. How often do we hear it repeated, in substance, if not in the same words! Go and converse with some persons upon the necessity of seeking religion now, and the awful danger of delay. They will profess to believe the truth of what you say, but they are not prepared to begin now. They reply: "I intend to seek religion some time, but I cannot do it now. My circumstances are such that I must defer it longer; but when I have a convenient season, I will do it deliberately, without any of your persuasions. I will not then wait to be invited or urged by any person, but will of my own accord give my heart to God, and engage in his service. I will call for the Spirit of God to awaken me from my sinful slumbers, to give me sorrow for my sins, and to make me willing to forsake my evil ways." Poor deluded mortals! How little do they know of themselves, of the depravity of their nature, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts, who think thus. They do not know that by nature they are utterly averse even to think of God and their souls; and that when left to themselves, so far from calling for the operations of the Spirit of God, the desires and thoughts of their hearts would be only evil, and that continually, without the shadow of good, or a moment's suspense. God calls upon the sinner to repent, but he will not

hear; the Saviour stands at the door and knocks, but he refuses to give him admission. And is it at all likely after the sinner has for a long time been deaf to the calls and the beseeching entreaties of heaven, that he will of his own choice seek for that to which he feels an utter aversion? No, never; no more likely nor possible than for a dead man to ask for life. There is no wish or desire of the fallen soul that would prompt such a request, but everything against it. But not only so; consider also how inconsistently he would act to what he supposes to be his interests. The sinner looks upon the work of repentance as a very bitter cup. He knows that in seeking religion he must taste in some measure the wormwood and the gall, and it would be the height of absurdity to suppose that he would deliberately desire to exchange the sinful pleasures which he so much loves, for the glowing and unpleasant work of repentance, which he dreads above all other things. No, he would no more do it than a man would desire and ask to be removed from the most splendid palace to the most loathsome prison. He will never call for the Spirit of God; for it would be the same thing as asking to be made miserable, just the reverse of what he is always seeking, viz., happiness. He will not call upon God, until by the irresistible conviction of the Holy Spirit all his sinful pleasures are poisoned, and he feels the misery of guilt, and the displeasure of God abiding on his perishing soul. And then, what does he ask for? Not to be made more miserable, but to be delivered from sinking down to hell under the burden of his condemnation. Now, do not misunderstand me. God does not irresistibly convert the sinner, but he does irresistibly convince him of sin, and show him his danger; and never until God thus works in him will he begin to work out his salvation. He will never pray for salvation until the Lord has alarmed his soul, by reasoning with him of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."

"I will call for thee." When will you call?

1. Some say—"If I were in the circumstances of such and such a person, who is surrounded by pious friends to encourage him, I would immediately seek religion."

2. Others intend to call when they get rich, and more free from the cares of the world. But riches indispose the heart, rather than incline it, to seek religion. "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" Mark x. 24.

3. Others say they will call upon the bed of death.

Circumstances will not change the heart of fallen man, whatever may be his outward condition. However favourable the circumstances in which he may be placed, there are the carnal mind, and a wicked heart. Until these are subdued and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, the sinner will remain careless, and not so much as have a serious thought of God and his soul, much less will he of his own accord seek the salvation of his soul.

See then the nature of this three-fold delusion.

The sinner delays repentance to another time. That he may never see. He expects a convenient season. That will never come. He intends to begin this work of his own accord. That he will never do. Here, then, is a three-fold cord by which Satan drags souls to everlasting perdition.

O Lord! I beseech thee, deliver my soul out of the snare of this infernal fowler. Amen!

SERMON XIX.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DELAY.

GO TRY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON,
I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

There is an old proverb which says, "Never put off until to-morrow, that which can as well be performed to-day." This is a very safe rule of conduct, and if strictly followed in all our worldly concerns, it would, doubtless, save us from many of those troubles and calamities which the violation of it frequently brings upon us. Delays, to say the least of them, are dangerous, and may prove ruinous to our intended plans, however firmly we may have them fixed in our minds, seeing that our life is but a floating vapour which may be suddenly dissipated.

But if it be wise never to defer until the future what can *as well* be done at present, it is surely a much wiser and safer rule of conduct, never to leave any thing until to-morrow which can be *much better* attended to to-day. This is the rule that is acted upon in most of the affairs of life. We generally give those things the first claim to our attention which we think of the highest importance. But in respect to the great

work of salvation, we pursue altogether a different course. We profess to believe that religion is the one thing absolutely essential both to our safety and happiness, and consequently an object which should engage our first and most serious attention. We know that life is very uncertain, and that our salvation must be obtained in this life, or not at all; and yet we continue to neglect it, and pursue other objects of only a moment's fleeting existence. Nor is it because we have determined to dismiss the subject of religion for ever from our minds. No, we all seriously resolve to attend to it at some time before we die; and while living without God day after day, and year after year, we fondly dream that all will be well at last, and cannot entertain even the idea that death will come unexpectedly and find *us* unprepared. I ask now, if these are not the thoughts of some of you? You are neglecting religion now, but you have no intention of doing so always. You delay attending to the subject now, hoping that some future season will be more favorable than the present; and when that imaginary time arrives, you think that you will commence the work in good earnest, and with all diligence make your calling and election sure.

You suppose that by delaying the work of repentance until a future season it will be easier, and less unpleasant to perform. Thus by this flattering delusion you are risking the highest interests of your natures, and the loss of heaven at last. But let us now examine the subject, and see, if we can, what are the real consequences of delay; whether or not there are any advantages connected with it.

I. In the first place, it may safely be said, that nothing is gained by delay.

Perhaps the only circumstance which can justify a delay in the performance of any work or duty, is when by doing so,

some real advantage is gained. This *may be* the case in some of the affairs of this world; but in respect to the great work of seeking religion, no advantage whatever can be obtained by delaying it to some future period.

I. No change will ever be made in the divine requirements to render the way of salvation any easier than it now is. The narrow way which leads to life will never be made wider. Let the sinner delay the work of salvation as long as he may, he will still be required to repent of his sins, to forsake his evil ways, deny himself of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart. He that believeth shall be saved, is the condition upon which salvation is offered to guilty man, and no other terms will ever be proposed. The heart must be chastened by sincere and genuine repentance, the proud soul must be humbled to feel its helplessness and misery, and trust alone in Christ for pardon. The standard of purity which the gospel now requires will never be altered. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is the commandment of the Saviour in the gospel, and this, like its author, is the "same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." If then the condition of salvation will be always the same, and if all the divine laws and precepts will be for ever binding, and must at all times be obeyed in order to secure the blessings of the gospel, no advantage whatever can be gained by delay: for the requirements of the gospel, will, at all future seasons, be as strict and unyielding as they are now.

2. But again: delaying the work of repentance unto a future time, will remove none of the obstacles which seem to be in the way of commencing it now. This is one reason why the sinner puts off seeking the salvation of his soul at the present. He thinks it is not a convenient season now. He ex-

pects such a season will arrive, When the insurmountable, obstacles which now appear in his way, will be removed, and he will then be able to commence and accomplish the work without having to contend with those difficulties which seem now to obstruct his path. This, however, is all a mere delusion of the deceitful heart. The longest delay will not in the least lessen the difficulties with which every fallen soul has to contend, and which must be overcome in order to obtain an inheritance in the kingdom of grace and glory. The world will always have its snares and allurements, and will ever be presenting them in all their varied forms, to enchant the soul, and lead it on in the broad road to ruin; and these will always have to be resisted. They will never of their own accord cease to draw the affections of the fallen soul to earth, and leave it free to pursue its upward and unobstructed course to heaven. There will always be a right hand to be cut off, or a right eye to be plucked out; a darling idol to be sacrificed; or a besetting sin to be forsaken. And the devil will never cease to oppose and to employ all his hellish arts to prevent the salvation of immortal souls. The longest lapse of years will not diminish the mighty opposition which he raises against those who are striving to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He will always be the uncompromising adversary of mankind, the roaring lion, and the angel of light, and in all his Proteus forms will ever wage a ceaseless warfare, and employ all his infernal arts to prevent the salvation of every soul.

Nor will the delaying repentance to some future time render the heart more disposed to attend to this work than it is now. This was the great mistake of Felix. He supposed that at some future season he would feel disposed to hear the Apostle "reason upon righteousness, temperance, and judgment to

come." For he says, "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." He very erroneously supposed that at some future period he would feel more disposed to listen to the truths of the gospel. Alas! how great was his mistake to suppose that the lapse of time would ever change the dispositions of his heart, or destroy its natural aversion to spiritual things. Nothing whatever is gained in this respect by delay. It will in no wise lessen the enmity of the carnal mind to God, nor will it render it more disposed to attend to the things which belong to its peace. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and always will be so until that enmity is subdued by the omnipotent agency of the Holy Spirit. The sinner may delay until his heart is silvered over with age. He may pass through afflictions the most severe, yet the longest delay, and the heaviest calamities can never tame the passions of his fallen soul, or dispose him to the exercise of that godly sorrow for sin which is necessary for his salvation. What then is gained by delay? If the divine requirements, or the condition of salvation, will be always the same; if the opposition with which every candidate for heaven has to contend, and to overcome, will never be less powerful and active, and the heart will never be more disposed to this work than now; if all things connected with the salvation of the soul remain unchangeable in their nature, it is very evident that no advantage is gained by delaying repentance to a future season.

II. But not only, may it be truly said, that nothing is gained by delay, but also, that much is lost. If it be true that man possesses an intellectual nature, whose desires cannot be satisfied with merely sensual enjoyments; and that while he remains in a state of alienation from God, he is destitute of those spiritual delights after which the soul aspires, and which can be found only in the possession of the saving grace of the

gospel, then all who neglect or delay repentance deprive themselves of those spiritual enjoyments which religion imparts to the soul.

1. It will hardly be necessary to say that time is lost. The moments and hours, and days in their rapid flight tarry for none. When once passed, they are gone for ever. And, in the loss of time, is necessarily included the ir retrievable loss of those golden opportunities for attending to, and securing, the great object of our present existence. This loss is the greater, because we have not one moment to spare; no time given us that we can afford to lose. The period allotted to man as the term of his earthly existence, is only just sufficient to enable him to accomplish the task assigned him. 'A moment spent in idleness, or an opportunity suffered to pass away unimproved, crowds the great business of life into a narrower space than that designed by the Creator for its performance. Every day affords numerous advantages for spiritual improvement, and every day's delay inflicts a loss which cannot be repaired. The sands which are perpetually dropping from the hour glass of life can never be returned to perform the same part in measuring the passing moments. A season of mercy unimproved carries its unchangeable report to the book of heaven's record, and will testify against us when the history of human conduct shall be read from the judgment throne.

2. The most favourable season for seeking the salvation of the soul is lost by delay. *Youth* is the most favourable time for commencing in the service of God; and the earlier in life this work is begun, the easier it will be performed. While the heart is tender, before the mind becomes entangled in the affairs, the business, and pleasures of this world, and the conscience seared by repeated acts of transgression, it is not so difficult to seek the Lord, and commence a religious life, as it

will be, when, by delaying this work, the heart becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and rendered less easily affected by the gracious influences of the holy Spirit. *The morning of life* is the best time to listen to the voice of heavenly mercy, before that sin closes the ears, and steels the heart, and renders us insensible to the subject of our soul's salvation.

But not only are the most favourable seasons lost by delay, but the difficulty of the work is also greatly increased. When the habits are formed, they are not easily broken off, and the longer the sinner continues in his sins, the more strongly are the chains of his spiritual bondage rivetted upon him. He finds himself more and more indisposed to think of his soul and eternal things; his unholy appetites are continually becoming the imperious masters of his soul, until they gain the complete ascendancy, and scarcely a possibility is left of ever escaping from the dominion of his destroying adversary.

3. The present enjoyment of the favour of God is lost by delay. That religion affords happiness to the soul far exceeding that of any earthly possession, is the united and uniform testimony of all, in every age and country, who have experienced its saving power. The Psalmist declares, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." It is religion alone that can impart to the soul of man the bliss after which it aspires. It is the one thing needful for the happiness of man amidst the changing scenes of the present life. Those who neglect to seek its possession, deprive themselves of those spiritual blessings with which true religion strews the path, and crowns the head, of all its possessors. In affliction, they feel not the sustaining consolations of divine grace. In losses and trials they have no source from which they can obtain comfort and

support. In life, they are deprived of its solid comforts. In death, of the victory it achieves, and the glorious prospect of a joyous immortality which it opens up to the soul.

4. Again : those who delay the work of salvation, if they ever finally obtain a place in heaven, diminish the value of their future reward. If the people of God will hereafter be rewarded according to their obedience and faithfulness on earth ; if every day's service will entitle them to a richer reward in heaven ; then, by every day's delay, they are suffering a loss which will affect their happiness, not in this life only, but even throughout eternity. Their delay will diminish the splendour of that unfading crown with which they otherwise might have been rewarded, had they commenced in early life, and spent all their days, and employed all their ransomed powers in the service of the Lord. With how great propriety then it may be said that much is lost by delay ; a loss of present blessings and of future joys, and a loss which can never be repaired.

III. The third and last consequence of delay is, that *every* thing is hazarded.

With no security for the continuance of life beyond the passing moment, and beset by dangers on every hand by which the period of probation may suddenly be closed, how awful is the risk which every person runs who delays repentance until a future season. He exposes himself to the danger of losing life and heaven, and to the bitter pains of eternal death.

How strong then are the arguments by which the necessity of an immediate attention to the concerns of the soul may be urged. If no advantage can be gained by delay, but if much is lost, and every thing that is valuable to the immortal spirit is hazarded, and in danger of being lost for ever, what inducement can there be for any to neglect their souls' salvation even

for a single day or hour ? They profess to believe in the absolute necessity of seeking a present salvation in order to qualify them for heaven, and yet uncertain as they know life to be, they continue to neglect the one thing needful, and thus to endanger their souls' everlasting welfare ; more concerned for the temporary possession of a few earthly treasures, than to secure " a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Are any of you speaking the language, and imitating the conduct, of Felix ? Your delay may prove your eternal ruin ! Thousands have perished for ever, who were once resolved to seek religion at some future, as they supposed, "convenient season." But that season never came, and notwithstanding all their good desires, and resolutions of attending to the subject of religion in future, they missed heaven and sunk down to hell. So it may be with you, and most certainly will, if you continue to delay the work of repentance until a "convenient season." The only scripturally "convenient season," is the *present*. "Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation." Now God calls you to repentance. To-morrow he may summon you to his presence. Will you delay any longer, and run the awful risk of being lost for ever ? May the Spirit of God open your eyes, and deliver you out of the snare of the devil, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

SERMON XX.

THE ABOUNDINGS AND REIGN OF SIN.

WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND: THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH, EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

ROMANS V. 20, 21.

The inspired writers in describing the moral character of man are exceedingly brief, and yet they have furnished us with the clearest and most comprehensive development of his nature and condition that could possibly have been given. Their descriptions may very properly be compared to the working of an experienced artist, who briefly sketches the outlines of his subject, and throws in the lights and shadows of the picture with that readiness and ease which proves how completely he is master of the *permanence*. Nor is this a matter of wonder, when we consider whence they drew their knowledge of the moral character of man. It was not from the deductions of human reason that they arrived at a correct understanding of the true condition of the race of mankind. It was not from the lengthened observation of an antediluvian age that they learned the secret workings of the human heart. Nor was it while sitting upon the summit of the highest earthly elevation,

and patiently observing the busy tribes of flesh and blood, that they recorded the history contained in the sacred writings. They learned the character and history of man under the tuition of an Infallible Teacher. Holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The eye that had surveyed, as with a single glance, all human affairs, from the first moment of time, guided the pen that has left us an unerring guide to the attainment of that knowledge which is to us of the highest importance. And the manner in which this knowledge is imparted is worthy of notice. It is not by lengthy and tedious descriptions, nor through the medium of a chain of abstruse reasoning. They simply announce the fact they wish to teach, and then give the naked history of man, as furnishing the clearest illustration, and the most convincing proof.

We have here, in the words we have selected, a brief statement of the subject to which we design to direct your thoughts, viz.: The effects of Sin. These words also contain a pleasing declaration of the gracious provision of Divine mercy; but upon this part of the subject we do not design to dwell; we shall merely glance at it by way of conclusion.

The subject then for our present meditation is the universal influence and awful effects of sin.

1. The apostle describes the awful influences and the fearful consequences of sin, by the declaration of two circumstances connected with it. Sin hath abounded,—and sin hath reigned unto death. These characteristics of sin are most fully exemplified in the general state of the human family, and also in the experience and conduct of every individual among the children of men.

Survey the history of the world from the earliest period of its existence; consult the most authentic records both of sacred

and profane writers, and what do we learn? Is not the whole history from the commencement to the conclusion a history of the universal prevalence and dominion of sin? It is true, indeed, that there was a very short space before the entrance of sin into our world. But how short was that period. When the Creator had finished his works, he pronounced everything good; but scarcely had the sound of his benediction died away, than we hear the announcement of a universal curse. Man created in the image of God, and invested with a higher authority than any other creature, rebelled against his Maker, and introduced misery and universal disorder into our world. And mark with what a fearful certainty the influence of the first transgression was perpetuated. The very first-born of Adam became a murderer of the darkest character, by imbruing his hands in his brother's blood. No sooner did men begin to multiply upon the earth, than the contagion spread with the most alarming rapidity. Hence we are informed that the wickedness of man was great; that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence;" for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Gen. vi. 12. Sin abounded and reigned to such an alarming extent, that it is declared, "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart," until he was constrained to give the most tremendous proof of his displeasure, by sweeping away the antediluvians as with the besom of destruction. God in his mercy preserved alive the family of Noah; but were the succeeding generations better than their predecessors? With all the advantages of the pious example and precepts of their father, how soon did they exhibit the tendency of mankind to universal depravity? The building of the tower of Babel was a fresh act of contempt of the Divine authority; and the character and conduct of the Sodomites gave fearful evidence of the aboundings of iniquity.

If, however, we consider for a moment the means which God has employed to counteract the progress of sin, we shall see more clearly the proneness of fallen man to yield to its dominion. God in his infinite wisdom selected one family from amongst the general mass of human depravity, in order thereby to manifest to the world the true knowledge and worship of himself. By a series of wonderful providences he established the posterity of Abraham in the land of Canaan, where they were separated from all the idolatrous nations of the earth, and distinguished by many invaluable privileges. They alone possessed the sacred oracles which contained the revelation of the will of God. They had the purest and most rational form of religious worship, and the whole of their economy, both civil and religious, instituted as it was by God himself, was calculated in a high degree to restrain every species of vice, and to promote genuine piety. If, therefore, there had ever been an exception to the general statement of the apostle in the text, or any part of the human family free from the influences of sin, it would certainly have been found in the case of the Jewish people. But with all their advantages and inducements to the most devout and ardent piety, what was their moral character as a nation, as we find it described by their own historians? See them while journeying through the wilderness, and while surrounded by the visible tokens of the Divine goodness and power. Hear their murmurings, and witness their ingratitude and rebellions. Moses calls them a stiff-necked people. He says, "Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you." "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked:" "He forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." And how many of them fell in the wilderness, as the fearful monuments of the abounding of iniquity? What is the subsequent history of this

people but an unbroken series of the most awful scenes of wickedness? Breaking through all the restraints of law and religious obligation, each was disposed to do that which seemed right in his own eyes. The historical writers of the Old Testament all concur in drawing the most melancholy picture of their country. The land was overrun with idolatry, oppression, profaneness, and crimes of the deepest dye. From the priest down to the lowest of the people, sin pervaded every rank, so that even the enlightened and highly favoured Jews were in general an ungodly and a wicked people. Sin abounded among them, and reigned over them.

If the state of the Jewish nation was so deplorably bad, what must have been the condition of the heathen who were involved in gross ignorance, and left to the unrestrained dominion of the propensities of fallen nature? We have the picture of their moral condition given by the apostle in the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Who, after reading that alarming description, will doubt the propriety and awful truth of the expression, "sin abounded?" Nor is this description of the apostle applicable merely to the heathen notions of antiquity, but to all of every age and country. The lapse of years has not in the least degree bettered the moral condition of mankind, nor have the advantages of civilization, science, and refinement, obliterated the traces of their fallen state. Whether we study the history of ancient or modern times; whether of barbarous or civilized countries; or the history of man under the influence of the various systems of religion; all will only serve to show that sin has universally abounded. It has passed over every boundary; overleaped every barrier, trampled on all authority, rejected all restraint, and bid defiance both to God and man.

Sin has not only abounded, but it has reigned, and usurped.

universal dominion. In opposition to the dictates of reason and conscience, of justice and gratitude, it has swayed a tyrant's sceptre over every part of the habitable globe. Ignorance, superstition, idolatry, learning, commerce, wealth, and rank, have all been pressed into its service. No monarch ever ruled over such extensive dominions, or with such an absolute sway. Its sovereignty has been acknowledged, and its laws have been obeyed in every country, city, town, and village; by the rich and the poor, old and young, the noble and vulgar, the learned and the ignorant. The universal reign of sin is proved by the universal ravages it has made; and it has given the most tremendous proof of its unlimited sovereignty; for sin has reigned unto death. If we inquire how death became the common lot of mankind, we answer, because of sin. Death has passed upon all, because all have sinned. That death has obtained an unlimited commission to attack every son and daughter of Adam, is a fact too notorious to be disputed, after the experience of nearly six thousand years. Neither rank nor station, neither wisdom nor power, nor even piety itself can claim any exemption, "for it is appointed unto men once to die." "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

But we may consider these characteristics of sin not merely in reference to mankind at large, but also as applicable to every individual of the human family. Sin has abounded, and reigned unto death in every child of man. We have seen from the universal prevalence of sin that none have escaped its direful influence; nor is it less true that it has abounded in every man to the utter exclusion of all that is good. However deluded moralists may speculate upon the dignity of human nature, it is not the less true that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually. In him there

dwelleth no good thing. The influence of sin hath extended over both body and mind, nor has any attribute of his original nature survived the ruins of the fall. "The whole head is sick," Isa. i. 5. Sin has abounded internally and externally. His thoughts, desires, and affections tend only to evil. He neither loves, fears, nor obeys God. His carnal mind is enmity against God. His heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked. His reason, which was given him for a lamp of light, serves only to lead him astray. The eyes of his understanding are so utterly darkened that he sees not the things which belong to his peace; he is wise to do evil, but to do good he has no knowledge nor inclination. He desires and delights in those things which are displeasing to God, and injurious to himself, while he rejects and disdains those things which would promote his own real welfare. His affections are earthly, sensual, and devilish, and his life, as the natural consequence, is nothing but a course of sinful conduct. The Heavenly Guest that originally dwelt in his breast is banished, and sin, as a strong man armed, sits there enthroned, and keeps possession of his palace. Man by his conduct has acknowledged sin as his sovereign, has vowed allegiance to it, and acted the part of a faithful and loyal subject. In common with the infernal hosts, he has taken up arms against the Almighty, and eternal King of heaven, bidding defiance to Jehovah himself. We may further remark, that in man, in his unregenerate state, the reign of sin is constant and uninterrupted. It commences with his existence, and it reigns at all times to the suppression and exclusion of every opposing principle. The character of the antediluvian sinners is applicable to every fallen man. Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually, without the smallest mixture of good, or the least intermission of evil; and it never

ceases to maintain its dominion until it produces its final effects. By the influence and the reign of sin every child of man is exposed to a variety of pains and diseases, and finally to death itself. Our bodies, which display the supereminent skill of the divine Architect, must die. It has reigned unto the death of the body,—the death of the soul,—to eternal death.

SERMON XXI.

THE SUPERABOUNDING AND REIGN OF GRACE.

WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND: THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH. EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

• ROMANS v. 20, 21.

IN the former remarks from these words, we have been led to consider the awful effects of sin, as displayed in its universal prevalence, and absolute and ruinous dominion. It will now be our more delightful employment to contemplate the fullness of the provision made for the restoration of our fallen race to all the blessings of their forfeited inheritance, and to even higher honours, and more exalted felicity, than they would have otherwise enjoyed. This is expressed by the Apostle in our text by the terms "grace has much more abounded," and "grace has reigned unto eternal life."

The first thing to which our attention is directed in considering the glorious remedy which Infinite Goodness has provided, to rescue our fallen race from the direful effects of sin in this world, and prove its fearful consequences in the future state of retribution, is the universality of its extent. The text says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more

abound." Wide spread as has been the prevalence of sin, the aboundings of divine grace have passed beyond, and encircled its utmost limits.

Fearful as have been the devastations which sin has made, in the scheme of redeeming mercy unfolded in the gospel we are furnished with a provision, ample in its extent, and containing every element necessary for repairing our moral desolations, and restoring the beauty of universal holiness wherever sin has spread its corrupting influence.

What then, we ask, does this declaration of the Apostle necessarily imply? We answer in the first place, it most certainly includes an unequivocal declaration of the freeness and universality of divine grace. It includes the whole human race, and is designed to accomplish the salvation of every child of man, through all the ages of the earth's existence, and in every clime. From its free and saving benefits no one individual of the human family has ever been, or ever will be, *unconditionally excluded*. Were it true; or could we for a moment suppose that multitudes, including by far the greater part of mankind, are doomed to an inevitable damnation, by a decree of Jehovah, irrespective of their moral character; then the declaration of the text, in order to accord with such a view of the scheme of redemption, would require, even a restricted reversion; and instead of, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," it should be, where sin abounded, grace did not extend; for in the case of those persons marked as the vessels of wrath, so far from there being any display of grace at all, there would be the manifestation of arbitrary power, injustice, and cruelty. But this monstrous doctrine, so utterly repulsive to the feelings of even our common humanity, is directly at variance with the whole tenor of Inspiration, and is contradicted by some of its plain-

est and most unequivocal declarations. "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works," *Psa. cxlv. 9*. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." *1 Tim. ii. 3, 4*. And for the accomplishment of this universal purpose, that Jesus Christ by the grace of God should taste death for every man, *Heb. ii. 2, 9*.

In the distribution of his temporal blessings, the Divine Being displays no proscriptive partiality. For "the eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season." And in the dispensation of the vastly more important spiritual benefits we behold the manifestation of the same impartiality and unrestricted benevolence. Can we then for a moment suppose, or have we the shadow of a scriptural season for believing, that He who thus scatters his temporal favours over the entire world of mankind, does, for arbitrary reasons, or for the mere display of his own uncontrollable sovereignty, deny to multitudes the possibility of a participation in the unspeakably more important blessings of His grace? It is true indeed, in looking over the world we behold a vast difference in the condition of the different tribes and nations; some enjoying all the advantages of civilization and refinement, and the light of Divine truth; while others are in a state of barbarism, and involved in heathenish darkness. Yet even this vast disparity in their external condition cannot be regarded as deciding the moral relations, or fixing the eternal destiny of a single individual. And although a knowledge of the plan of salvation as unfolded in the Gospel is unquestionably an invaluable privilege, yet even this is not absolutely essential to the final enjoyment of the salvation which it offers. Thus in the case of those who are destitute of the light of revelation, through no fault of their own, if they walk

according to that light that cometh into the world; and obey the teachings of that grace which bringeth salvation, and which appeareth unto all men, they will be accepted of God, and enjoy the eternal reward of their obedience, though the plan by which they are saved may not be unfolded to them until they see it in the light of eternity. The salvation of upright heathens obeying the law written upon their hearts, as also that of idiots and children, is secured upon the only sure foundation of the Redeemer's mediatorial work. Nor is it any more impossible or unreasonable to suppose that they may be saved through a medium, and in a way to them unknown, than that in a manner and for a cause to them equally mysterious and unaccountable, they should be involved in the consequences of the fall, and exposed to a variety of sufferings, and to death at last.

With no other view than that of the plenitude and universal extent of the provision of grace can we reconcile the goodness of the Deity in the perpetuation of the human race. Although multitudes would thus be involved in misery and woe, without any fault of their own, yet no injustice would be done to any, as every one would be fully indemnified through the aboundings of Divine grace for whatever sufferings might be endured, unless by a rejection of the offered remedy, they transfer the guilt of disobedience and its deserved punishment to their own souls. In the aboundings of Divine grace, it is restrained by no limits *within* the utmost extent of human misery. As all without exception have suffered by the aboundings of sin, so all are invited, and capacitated to obtain the blessings of salvation, and to enjoy a fullness and eternity of bliss.

2. But the language of the text implies even more than this. We are here taught that the grace of God is not only

sufficient to reverse the effects of sin, and save from its future consequences, and to raise mankind to the possession of all that they have lost by the fall, but also, that through the exceeding riches of grace, they will be promoted to higher honours, and enjoy a more exalted state of happiness than man would have inherited had he remained in a state of innocence. This view of the subject is fully warranted by the peculiar mode of expression employed by the apostle in the text. It is not merely, "where sin abounded, grace did" also "abound;" but "did much more abound," or passed *far beyond*, as the original term signifies.

Sin is, indeed, an awful evil, but in the case of all who accept the provided remedy, so far from suffering any real loss, the riches of the Divine goodness are most marvellously displayed in making the apostacy of our first parents the occasion of an eternal gain to all their believing posterity.

In no other sense can we properly understand the Apostle when speaking of the superabounding of grace. The scheme of redemption cannot be supposed to include more in number than those affected by sin. It must, therefore, necessarily refer to the measure of grace enjoyed by those who receive its benefits. The grace of God superabounds in the degree of happiness it confers upon all who believingly embrace it. It passes far beyond the utmost extent of the aboundings of sin, delivering mankind from its present dominion, and advances all the subjects of its saving power to an "exceeding great and eternal weight of glory" in the heavenly world. Not only have we reason to believe that the happiness of the redeemed will be greater than they would otherwise have enjoyed, but even superior to that of angels. For while saints may join in concert with angels in their highest ascriptions of praise to their Creator and

King, in that song of triumph which the redeemed shall sing with the highest emphasis and joy, angels cannot unite. And when all the hosts of heaven, with a blended voice that shall go up as the noise of many waters, sing, "Great and marvellous are thy works Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints," the ransomed throng will attune their golden harps to a nobler song, and with higher notes than angel harps can sound, will sing, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Had man retained his state of innocence, his happiness would doubtless have been even and uninterrupted, and his removal to another state would, in all probability, have increased his felicity, but to what extent we have no means of determining. But go now and trace the progress of the redeemed sinner through the vicissitudes of this vale of woe until he stands before the throne of God and the Lamb, and while we are assured that he enjoys all that he would have possessed had he never fallen, yet his chief happiness will consist in his ceaseless ascriptions of praise to the Lamb for his redemption. Is it not reasonable, too, to suppose that creatures who have been raised from the degradation and misery to which sin had sunk them, to the enjoyment of celestial delights, will feel stronger emotions of gratitude and love than beings who had never personally experienced the evils of a fallen state ? To whom is rest so agreeable, and who enjoy peace with so high a relish as those who have passed through scenes of labour and strife, and who, after their toils and commotions have ceased, are permitted to enter upon the enjoyment of a delightful reverse of for-

tune? So the very scenes of trial and suffering, through which the saints of God shall have passed on earth, will heighten the eternal bliss of heaven, while from their lofty seats they will fathom the depths of the horrible pit from which they have been raised to their unspeakable height of glory and of joy; and the amazing and delightful contrast between their former and their latter state will only serve to increase their grateful love, and thus augment the richness of their heavenly delights. In the visions of God, with which John the Revelator was favoured, he saw a company standing apparently nearer to the throne of God and the Lamb than others. They were clothed in white robes, and having palms in their hands, "They cried with a loud voice, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." While he was gazing with mute astonishment upon the enraptured host, he was accosted by one of the elders, saying, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" He replied, "Sir, thou knowest." And who were they? Hear the answer, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God;" near to, or in the immediate presence of the throne of God, "and serve him day and night in his temple." And if the happiness of the heavenly hosts is in proportion to their nearness to the eternal throne, then will the bliss of saints be superior to that of angels, for they are represented as standing before the throne, and the angels are round about the throne, and about the elders. Thus through the abounding of grace poor sinful mortals are raised to the highest summit of created bliss.

Again; had man never apostatized, his relation would

have been that of a servant or a subject of the Heavenly King. But how widely different are the relations he will sustain when placed amongst the ransomed hosts as the subjects of redeeming grace! The various terms employed by the inspired writers in describing the privileges of Christian believers, are such as are never applied to even the highest orders of the angelic hosts. It is the ransomed sons of earth, and they only, that we are informed, shall be the "heirs of God," and "joint heirs with Jesus Christ,"—"kings and priests unto God;" and they are finally to sit down with Jesus Christ on his throne, even as he is set down with his Father on his throne. Well may the poet ask in amazement—

"How can it be, thou Heavenly King,
That thou shouldest us to glory bring?
Make slaves the partners of thy throne,
Decked with a never-fading crown?"

We may notice, also, that the exalted honours of the redeemed will not be those enjoyed as a patrimonial inheritance, but as the triumphant issue of a mighty contest. Hence their crowns will be crowns of conquest and of glory, and unfading as the diadem which adorns the head of the martial hero, when he receives token of universal conquest. And how inconceivably will this increase the value of their eternal reward! Who among the sons of earth enjoys the highest renown? the hereditary king, or he who has attained to regal honours and an imperial throne by a succession of brilliant achievements? The honours of the saints will be those of a well-earned renown; their regal dignity as the co-heirs with Christ on his throne, will be the glorious reward of the victories they with him have achieved over the common foe. Hence says the Saviour, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even

as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. iii. 21. How marvellous are the ways of God in his dealings with his rebellious creature man! Instead of immediately inflicting upon the first guilty pair the extreme penalty of their crime, and thus terminating man's earthly existence, he designs to perpetuate the race, and through the wondrous scheme of redemption, he makes even the calamities of our fallen state the occasion of contributing to the eternal gain of all who cordially embrace the offered remedy.

II. Our text leads us further to notice the universal dominion of Divine grace, as well as its universal prevalence. Sin has reigned unto death, even so grace in the exercise of its counteracting influence, must reign unto eternal life.

The form of expression here employed in describing the operation of grace as the antagonist of sin, leads us to the contemplation of that delightful subject so often the theme of prophetic song, and the object of triumphant anticipation, the universal extent of the Redeemer's dominion.

Wherever sin has reigned, (and where has it not swayed a tyrant's sceptre?) there grace must display its mightier power, and break the usurper's cruel reign.

This glorious consummation, so ardently desired and sought by every subject of grace, is secured by the unfailing promises of Jehovah. To notice all these would be to repeat the whole volume of Inspiration. This was that conspicuous object that attracted every prophetic eye—the perpetual burden of prophetic song—the joy set before the Redeemer, and by which he was sustained amidst the sufferings of his mediatorial conflict. It was while looking down the long line of ages to the end of time, and beholding in the widely spreading and multiplying triumphs of the cross,

many sons coming unto glory, that he saw "of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied."

We may here just notice two predictions respecting the universal reign of grace. In the second Psalm, the Father is represented as speaking to the Son, and saying—"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." And then, as the counterpart or fulfillment of this promise, when the last of the apostolic angels had sounded his trumpet, the united voices of the heavenly hosts announce the consummation of the reign of grace: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever." Rev. xi. 15. In the universal reign of grace is implied the universal diffusion and reign of truth. Error and superstition will then cease to mislead and enslave the children of men, and truth, mightier than all its antagonists, will have gained its appointed destination, and accomplished its universal triumphs. And how much is there in the present aspects of the world to indicate the speedy and near approach of this desired consummation! Never, perhaps, was the pure truths of the Gospel more widely diffused, more rapidly spreading, or waging a more deadly war on every form of error. Nor does even the revival of the worst errors of Popery, by so-called Protestants, present any omen unfavourable to the accomplishment of the predicted result. It is the mustering of the hosts to the last battle—the convulsive struggles of a dying monster. Such has been the rapid progress of the truth, that error has been compelled to summon to its aid the testimony and authority of the Fathers, and the decisions of councils; thus invoking the imaginary sanctions and authority of antiquity, to prolong a little the

existence of those errors which are as certainly doomed to perish by the omnipotence of Truth, as the darkness of the night disappears before the approach of day. Then shall grace reign triumphantly without a rival; for all kindreds, nations, people, and tongues, shall yield a cheerful obedience to the king of Zion. But we may consider this subject in its application to the experience of the Christian believer, and as a declaration of the efficacy of Divine grace in the heart of man, suppressing and destroying sin. As sin has reigned in the heart of every child of man, and reigned to the utter exclusion of everything that is good, so grace is to be equally extensive and powerful in its influence. It is to reign to the entire exclusion of every evil, until that grace which was imparted in a measure at the first, pervades the affections, controls the will, influences all the actions, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The lowest privilege of the Christian believer is to have power over all sin, and to be freed from its service and bondage. But in the possession of this state of grace there may be the remains of a corrupt nature, which, through the restraining power of divine grace, are prevented from breaking out into acts of open disobedience. Hence the internal conflicts of the believer in resisting the lusts of the flesh, and striving against the evil suggestions of their own hearts. As the heavenly work proceeds in the heart, the power of sin becomes weaker, and the influence of grace continues to increase until every opposing principle is destroyed, and Divine grace maintains the undivided dominion of the heart.

Now, the text teaches us that the influence of grace is to be as extensive and powerful as that of sin. As sin abounds in every unregenerate man to the utter exclusion of everything

that is good, so grace is to abound to the entire destruction of every evil. As the sinner, while he was the servant of sin, was free from righteousness, so when by the power of grace he becomes the servant of God, he is made free from sin. In his former state he brought forth the fruits of sin, but now he has his fruit unto holiness. The grace of God is designed to pervade and fill the whole soul, and to exert its controlling power over all the faculties, and over every thought, word, and action. As in the former state, every Divine impression was speedily erased, every good desire quenched, every holy resolution frustrated, and sin reigned without intermission and without control, so grace is to reign.

Grace is to reign through righteousness. As sin works out its fearful results by depraving all the faculties of the soul, so grace is to reign by conforming the heart to the Divine mind, bringing all the thoughts and desires under the control of just and righteous principles; thus producing in the outward conduct the fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of God.

As the tendency of the reign of sin was unto death, so that of grace is unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXII.

THE FINAL DISTINCTION.

THEN SHALL YE RETURN, AND DESCEND BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS
AND THE WICKED, BETWEEN HIM THAT SERVETH GOD AND HIM THAT
SERVETH HIM NOT.

MAL. iii. 18.

IN a state of trial like that in which mankind are placed, there will of necessity be found a diversity of character, or a mixture of good and evil; nor is it possible to separate the one from the other so long as the term of probation continues. Each subject of a state of trial must be left to take the unbiassed direction of its own will; to choose virtue, or to prefer vice; to obey the mandates of the Creator, or to refuse subjection to his authority; and while this is the case, and a variety of conflicting motives incites to actions of different kinds, both good and bad, there will be found existing as the natural consequence of free agency, or liberty of action, a diversity of characters. The history of the creation proves the truth of this. The period of even angelic probation did not terminate without the entrance of evil into the once pure society of heaven. And the innocence of Eden was soon despoiled of its beauty and loveliness by the foul stain of guilt. Whether or not the existence of evil is a necessary

consequence of free agency and a state of trial, we would not pretend to determine. We wish to speak merely in reference to the actual condition of our world. We are in a state of trial, sin has entered, man is a fallen and depraved creature, and there is here a mixture of good and evil, and will continue to be until the closing up of the present scene, and the termination of the period appointed as the term of man's trial, which is to decide his changeless destiny throughout an unending existence. The dispensations of the Great moral Governor of the world, during the period of the trial of free agents, must necessarily involve much mystery, and often apparent partiality, and even injustice, in the estimation of beings who cannot survey them in reference to their primary cause and ultimate effects. The distinction between good and evil, virtue and vice, is not always so evident as from their antagonistic natures we might suppose it ought to be. Nor could the proper distinction here be made in harmony with the free moral agency of man. Were virtue always sure of an immediate and full reward, and vice of its proper punishment, man would be placed in such circumstances of inducements and restraints, from hope and fear, as would in effect destroy the very object of his present state of existence, which is to leave him free to act according to the inclinations of his own will. But when the scene of his present probation shall close, all mystery will be unfolded, and good and evil will be separated as widely as the two extremes of their opposite natures; and "then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

I. We learn, first, from these words, that the distinction between the good and bad is not always so evident in this world as to be determined with absolute certainty."

II. That there is a time coming when this distinction will be made so apparent as to be clearly seen by all.

I. The text speaks of two general classes, the righteous and the wicked; him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not; and these two embrace the whole human family. And whatever may be the apparent, and almost infinite diversity of character amongst mankind, all other distinctions are lost in these. Yet wide, and real, and essential as the difference is between these two classes, it is not in all cases so marked as to render it certain to those who judge from the mere outward appearance, nor can we under all circumstances determine from the external conduct of men, to which of the general classes they belong. It is true that there are persons whose characters are clearly discerned, and there need not be a moment's hesitation in deciding concerning them. We see some who are manifestly righteous, uniform, and untiring in their zeal for God and his cause, habitually just, benevolent, and compassionate, living for the good of others, and aiming with a single eye at the glory of God. It is very easy to discern to what class they belong, for their whole conduct speaks a language which cannot be misinterpreted by even the most captious. Others are as manifestly wicked, and notorious for their enmity to God, and disregard of his commandments. In their hearts, and by words and deeds they say, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" Job xxi., 15.

In respect to these, we can even here determine to which class they belong, for the character they bear is written upon their foreheads as with the sun-beam of heaven's own light. But there are many concerning whom it is very difficult to decide. They are like persons who live upon the confines of two countries, inhabiting, and enjoying the advantages of both as far as possible, without knowing, or having any particular care, to which they belong. They *appear* to be neither for Christ nor

against him ; neither cold nor hot ; having so many good qualities that it might seem improper to class them directly with the wicked, and yet not good enough to be considered righteous. Such were those among the people of Israel concerning whom the Lord himself inquires, "What shall I do unto thee?" (Hos. vi. 4,) as though it were a puzzling question for even Infinite Wisdom to decide with which class they should be numbered, and what ought to be their doom.

Consider this subject in another light, as referring to the fact that in the dispensations of Divine Providence in conducting the grand scheme of his moral government towards the accomplishment of its ultimate design, there is not always a marked distinction between the condition of the righteous and the wicked. The two *characters* can never be blended in one. However nearly they may seem to resemble each other, they are distinct in their natures ; but the condition of both may be, and often is, alike as it respects their temporal circumstances. They are fellow-partakers in many of the blessings and comforts of this life ; and they share in common the sorrows and calamities inseparable from even the most highly favoured state of man's earthly existence. The same sun-light that cheers the abodes of devoted piety, illumines the habitations of undissembled wickedness. The same showers that fertilize the fields of the just, fall on the possessions of the unjust, and fill their garners with an abundance of the precious fruits of the earth. The same pestilence which, in its terrific march, leaves the proud and profane the lifeless victims of its fury, often strews its path with earthly tabernacles which were the temples of the living God. Although true piety is unquestionably connected with many advantages even in this life, yet the most devoted servants of God have no assurance of exemption from the common evils which are the entailed inheri-

tance of our race. They, as well as the wicked, are exposed to losses. Their riches may suddenly be dissipated by the consuming flames; disease may blast their beauty, and wither their strength; and death, which happens to all, will finally mingle their bodies with their native elements. So that in this respect, the Divine dispensations in the distribution of temporal blessings afford no criteria by which to judge of the moral characters of men. The Divine Being does indeed give the seal of his approbation to the conduct of the righteous; and often manifests his fierce displeasure against the wickedness of the wicked; so far at least as it is necessary to afford the highest encouragement to virtue, and to place the strongest restraints upon vice.

In the present state of probation the righteous are incited to maintain their integrity and to the practice of a cheerful obedience, by the inspiring hope of future rewards, rather than by the almost compelling motives of immediate gain; while at the same time the wicked are restrained in their course, not by the strong arm of Almighty power, but by the certainty of merited punishments in the day of final retribution. Were the righteous to be exempted from all the calamities and sorrows incident to human life, and the wicked always to be visited with the immediate reward of their crimes, this vast distinction would in effect destroy the free agency of man, by compelling him to act from circumstances, rather than leading him to obedience from the influence of motives drawn from the consideration of a future state, and not as in any wise materially affecting his present condition. So that in regard to the exercise of the Divine munificence, we cannot here discern between the righteous and the wicked; as the former cannot boast any peculiar advantages, nor the latter complain of unjust privations, "The eyes of all wait upon"

the Lord, and He gives them "their meat in due season." Psa. cxlv. 15.

But farther : not only are not the righteous to be discerned from the wicked, as being the subjects of the special smiles of Divine Providence, but, judging from present appearances, we should often conclude that the wicked have even the better portion. They seem to flourish and spread themselves like a green bay tree ; their eyes stand out with fatness, and they have more than heart can wish. "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world ; they increase in riches." Psalm lxxiii. And while they revel in the possession of a luxurious abundance, the humble servants of God are often found struggling against the severest blasts of adversity. Read the history of the world, and what do you learn ? That the wicked have often enjoyed an abundance of earthly blessings, and been promoted to the highest worldly honours, while the righteous have been destitute, afflicted, and despised. Egypt and Babylon triumph, while Israel the chosen people of God are in bondage, and laden with the galling yoke of cruel oppression. Jezebel, guilty of every abomination, is rioting in luxury, while an hundred prophets of the Lord in their secluded retreats are fed with bread and water. 1 Kings xviii. 4. Cesar upon his throne, sways the sceptre over thousands, while Paul, the messenger of the most High, deprived of his liberty, lies incarcerated in a dungeon. The rich man is clothed in the most costly apparel, and feeds upon the richest dainties of an eastern clime, while Lazarus, racked with the pains of disease, asks for no better earthly portion than the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table. We may sometimes wonder and inquire why it is that the righteous are often the subjects of adversity, while the ungodly are favoured with the sunshine of wordly prosperity. This apparent mystery can be explained

only upon the general principle, that a state of trial is necessarily connected with diversity in the Divine dispensations, not always in accordance with the moral characters of men; but ordered with a wise reference to the promotion of their highest and most valuable interests. The righteous would often seem to be the objects of God's displeasure from the afflictions and privations they endure; while the wicked, in the possession of every earthly good, appear to enjoy the peculiar smiles of Divine favour. But whatever of mystery there may be connected with the present state of mankind, the day is coming when it will be fully unfolded, and the distinction between the two classes of the human family will no longer be obscure. "And then shall ye return and discern" the amazing difference between them, without any hesitation, or possibility of mistake.

II. Our second proposition is, that there is a time coming when the distinction between the righteous and the wicked will be so evident as to be seen by all.

The time to which reference is here made is the day of final judgment, when each individual of the human race will appear in his true character, and receive his appropriate reward according to a just estimate of his moral worth. Then all doubt and uncertainty will be removed, and the revelations of eternity, and the decisions of Jehovah's impartial tribunal, will disclose what our prejudices, the weakness of our understanding, or the veil of hypocrisy, may have hidden from our knowledge in this world.

These words are spoken in the form of a direct address, and they were doubtless designed to refer to those who, in the former part of this chapter, are described as giving utterance to their infidel sentiments and feelings, by saying, "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordi-

nance, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" Here these persons receive an answer. It is true, indeed, that it may now seem to you in vain to serve God. You may think that there is no essential advantage connected with the keeping of his commandments. On the contrary, the faithful observance of his ordinances and precepts may expose you to suffering, persecution, and to apparent losses; but though you may not see any material difference in the condition of the righteous above that of the wicked, yet be ye assured that when the present scene of things shall have passed away, and the day of final retribution shall have come, in the decisions and results of that day ye shall discern the difference in the condition of the righteous and the wicked, the blessed reward of those who serve God, and the fearful doom of those who serve him not.

Let us consider then for a moment, in the events of that day, the reasons which will enable us to discern between the two classes that will compose the assembly of that awful day.

We shall be able then to discern between the righteous and the wicked, because an entire separation will be made of the one from the other, and made, too, by Him whose omniscience will qualify him to render that separation perfectly correct.

Nothing can surpass the imposing grandeur of the scene which the Scriptures present to our view when they describe the events of the final day. The Judge, arrayed in the significant insignia of his solemn office, sits upon his throne, surrounded by myriads of the hosts of heaven; an archangel herald announces the sitting of the final tribunal, and summons all who have been the inhabitants of earth to appear before the judgment seat. Then the final separation takes place. For "he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." The mixture of good and bad which now exists will then cease. The wheat and the tares

must grow together until the harvest; the righteous and the wicked must necessarily associate in this world; but when the purposes of Divine Providence shall have been accomplished, and the period of man's probation closed, the two great classes of mankind will be as distinctly divided as the moral characters they bear are dissimilar. And the different places which these two classes will occupy will but render the distinction between them the more apparent, for he shall "set the sheep on his right hand but the goats on the left." The difference, too, in their characters will then be more strongly marked than ever it was in the present state. The righteous will then appear more eminently righteous. Freed from all the imperfections and dishonour of their fallen state, and arrayed in the deathless purity and spiritual beauty of a glorified immortality, they shall shine forth with the lustre of the stars which adorn the firmament of heaven. Their graces will then no longer be obscured by the weakness and imperfections of a fallen nature, but raised up from all the degrading effects of the fall, and transformed to a perfect resemblance of the glorious Redeemer; they shall be known of all as the heirs of heaven. While, on the other hand, the wicked will there exhibit in full their evil character. The evil of hypocrisy will be rent assunder, and their wickedness appear in its native deformity without any mixture of good.

2. Another reason which will enable us to discern between the righteous and the wicked, is the wide difference which will mark the Divine conduct at that awful period. Then shall He render to every man according to his works. He will then no longer treat his enemies as friends. Here they are partakers in common of the blessings of a bounteous Providence. The same hand that feeds the righteous, supplies the wants of the wicked. But the dealings of God towards his creatures in

that day will be conducted upon principles widely different from those which regulate the dispensations of his moral government. Here all are the subjects of his fatherly care, and the partakers of his bounty, whatever may be their moral character; but then upon the righteous *only* will he smile with approbation, while the wicked must wither beneath the frowns of his fierce displeasure. He will then confer upon his faithful people the glorious rewards he has promised. To those who by patient continuance in well-doing have sought for the honours of a blessed immortality, he will give eternal life. Before an assembled world he will rehearse their "work of faith, and labour of love," and acknowledge them as the members of his family, the subjects of his kingdom, and the heirs of an unfading crown. But to those who have been disobedient and unrighteous he will render "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." The day of favours with them will be for ever past, and the dispensations of Divine mercy will be exchanged for the retributions of justice, in the infliction of their merited punishment. Then they will hear from the book of God's remembrance the history of their lives of impiety, ingratitude, and sin; and read in the manifested tokens of heaven's displeasure the horror of their final doom.

3. Wide also will be the difference between these two characters, as seen in the feelings they will possess in that awful day; nor will this be the least significant mark by which each will be distinguished. Amidst the melting elements of the wreck of nature, and the solemnities of the final tribunal, the righteous will lift up their hands rejoicing. Here they may have been the children of many sorrows, fears and conflicts; and with weeping sowed the seeds of life; but then they will come forth with rejoicing, laden with the sheaves of an abundant and glorious harvest. Then all tears shall be wiped away from

their eyes. No guilty fears will agitate their souls, no portending tokens of heaven's displeasure will fill them with disquietude and alarm. No accusing conscience will disturb their peace. Saved from sin through faith in the blood of the cross, the decisions of the final tribunal will have no terrors to them. The joys of the ransomed of the Lord shall be upon their heads, the songs of salvation shall inspire their hearts, and dwell upon their tongues. O how it will fill the righteous with raptures of unutterable delight, when they shall behold the Saviour coming in the clouds of heaven to claim them as the sanctified purchase of his blood; to place upon their heads the unfading crown of glory; and to escort them in his train of heavenly attendants to their long desired home! Then will they rejoice as warriors who have just finished their warfare, gained a complete triumph over their foes, and won the laurels of immortal fame.

How different will be the feelings of the wicked! Instead of the boldness and confidence which the righteous shall possess, a shivering horror will seize their souls, and fill them with unutterable anguish. Their sins now marshalled in fearful array will stare them in the face. The frowns of Jehovah will settle upon them; and the stinging accusations of a guilty conscience supplied with inexhaustible materials from the records of a faithful memory, will repeat the history of their lives, and unfold a tale of darkness and crime which will cover them with shame and confusion of face. O to appear in the presence of a neglected Saviour, and that Saviour now their judge, and to hear the history of their whole lives repeated in the presence of an assembled world, will arouse every feeling of their souls, and inflict miseries intolerable to be borne. You will then discern between them and the righteous; from the wide contrast between the sensations they will each ex-

perience. The one will rejoice, the other will weep. The one will triumph as the hero who has won the final victory; the other will seek in guilty shame to hide from observation beneath the fallen rocks and mountains.

4. But the last reason why we shall then be able to discern so distinctly between these two classes, will be the sentence that will be pronounced upon each.

When the final separation shall have taken place, the righteous upon the right hand of the Judge, and the wicked upon the left, "then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungry," &c. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Then shall ye discern between them, because the distinction will be as wide as the difference between heaven and hell. One shall inhabit the mansions of glory; and the other the prison house of woe. One shall associate with angels before the eternal throne; the other be the sport of demons in the lake of unquenchable fire.

Do you wish to discern between them? Go and see them both when rewarded according to their works; and while you behold them, the one enjoying the fullness of eternal blessedness, and the other suffering the bitter pains of eternal death, learn that, verily, there is a God that rewardeth the righteous, and that judgeth the wicked. Now let us seriously inquire respecting ourselves individually. To which of these classes do we belong? The word of God affords an unerring rule by which to test our real character. If we live in ignorance of our condition here, we may not discern it until it is for ever too late, and the decisions of the final day have sealed our everlasting doom.

SERMON XXIII.

LIGHT SHINING TO PERFECT DAY.

BUT THE PATH OF THE JUST IS AS THE SHINING LIGHT, THAT SHINETH MORE AND MORE UNTO THE PERFECT DAY.

PROVERBS iv. 18.

LIGHT is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful and appropriate metaphors by which the sacred writers furnish us with clear and impressive descriptions of those spiritual realities which form the leading subject of all the inspired revelations. It is frequently used as an emblem of God himself; of whom the apostle John says, (1 John i. 5,) "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." The sun—as the centre of our planetary system, the radiant orb which illumines our earthly home—dimly shadows forth the inconceivable glory and majesty of Him who is the grand source of all the intellectual, moral, and spiritual light of the universe of living beings.

Nor does it less significantly illustrate the progressive operations of that grace by which fallen man is reserved from the dominion of the prince of darkness, and elevated to that exalted position in the scale of intellectual existence, and to the possession of those spiritual joys for which he was created. The magnificent source of light, the inconceivable rapidity of its

motion, its universal diffusion and wonderful effects, are properties which render it an emblem beautifully appropriate in describing the spiritual things connected with the economy of human redemption.

In the operations of the material world, sudden changes from one state to another seldom take place, and, indeed, never, unless from some suspension or irregular action of the laws of nature. The change from the darkness of the night to the light of the day is always gradual. So the transition of the human mind from ignorance to the possession of extensive knowledge, is effected not by a sudden flight, but by progressive steps, slowly and gradually taken. We may witness the existence of the same law in the accomplishment of the great and incomparably glorious work of the salvation of the immortal soul. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that a change so great as this cannot be suddenly effected. It must advance by persevering application from one degree of knowledge to another, until, by the gradual expansion of its powers of conception, it is able with all saints to comprehend the more profound and glorious mysteries of the scheme of redemption. And although it is often the case that the deliverance of the soul from the darkness and slavery of sin, and its elevation to the enjoyment of the light and liberty of salvation, is effected, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, yet when we examine the whole process by which man is transformed to the moral image of his God, and prepared for the enjoyment of the spiritual delights of his future home in the skies, we may see the illustration of the truth expressed in the figurative language of the text, that "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

I. By the just man here mentioned we are, doubtless, to understand the man of sincere, ardent, and persevering piety ;

one who not merely begins, but also continues in the service of God; he who not only enters the straight gate, but who also walks in the narrow path until he finishes his career on earth. The term "just," as here applied, may be understood as descriptive of the character of the truly pious, both as it respects the relation in which they stand in the sight of God, their inward experience, and their external conduct. The character and experience of the people of God have been the same in all ages, and under every dispensation, whether patriarchal, Jewish, or Christian; and whatever terms were employed in other ages, as descriptive of their character, retain even now all their propriety of application. This term may be applied to every Christian. He is a just man. He is not so by nature. There is no exception to the broad declaration of Scripture, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Rom. iii. 10. "All have sinned," and stand guilty in the sight of God. All are accounted as criminals, and condemned—as the transgressors of the righteous laws of God. But the persons who may be termed just, in the evangelical signification of the term, are those who have been justified by obedience to the requirements of the economy of redeeming mercy. Being justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are as completely free from all the guilt and condemnation of their past sins, as though not a single act of either transgression or delinquency had marked their conduct. And hence they are termed "just," because they stand fully acquitted, and are accounted righteous before God. But we may understand this term as also referring to their inward experience, the transformation of their souls to the Divine likeness. They are not merely accounted as just, or righteous, but they are also made really so. They are created anew in righteousness and true holiness, and made partakers of the moral image of God. They may

also be termed just, because of the rectitude which is displayed in all their outward conduct. They render to all their dues, "tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." They discharge to the utmost of their ability the obligations they owe to God and to their fellow-creatures. They acknowledge the claims of God upon them by devoting their time and talents to his service. Because they are not their own, but the property of the Lord, by a threefold right. they seek to glorify him in their bodies and souls, by an unreserved consecration of all that they possess, to be employed in promoting his glory.

Being delivered from both the guilt and dominion of their sins, they live the life of faith and holy obedience, walking in the light of the Divine countenance, and regulating their conduct by the just and unerring precepts of the word of God.

But the great truth contained in these words is not merely intended to give us a description of the traits of character which belong to the pious, but rather to furnish us with a most pleasing and impressive illustration of that steady and uninterrupted progress towards perfection in religious experience, which it is the privilege of every real believer to make while in this world, until delivered from all the effects of the fall, and raised up to the enjoyment of the unsullied bliss of heaven.

The figure here employed is taken from the rising of the sun, which pursues its shining course from the horizon to its meridian height, and sheds upon the earth the increasing fervency of its rays, until it displays the perfect beauty and glory of the noon-day sun. And such is the manner in which the light of heavenly wisdom gradually dispels the darkness of the fallen soul, until it is translated from the rayless gloom of its moral night to the unclouded splendour of the perfect day of heaven. This work is gradual in its progress, as is the change from the darkness of midnight to the light of noonday.

Or we may take another view of the figure employed in the text, and in order to understand it more clearly, let us suppose that here is a person in the centre of surrounding darkness, and anxiously desiring to behold the light. Towards a certain quarter he discovers a few glimmering rays which in a measure lighten the surrounding gloom, and enables him to proceed in that direction. As he advances the light increases, and he walks with less hesitation and with greater pleasure, because with less fear of danger. Each successive step, as it brings him where he can see the objects around him more clearly, affords him increasing delight. Thus, as he continues to advance, he finds the path becoming more and more brilliantly illumined and increasingly pleasant, until finally it conducts him where

"Neither cloud nor thinner vapour obscures his sky,
And unsullied noon-light greets his wishful eye."

The commencement of his path may have been illumined by but a single ray of light thrown into the midst of a midnight gloom, and there forming, as it were, a centre around which other rays are perpetually gathering, until it becomes a globe of light, which, by the overwhelming splendour of its beams, dispels the darkness, and sheds upon his path the unclouded light of the perfect day.

So it is in the transition of the fallen soul; from the opening morning of its spiritual illumination, throughout the whole length of its gradual progress in Divine knowledge and heavenly graces, until it is fully fitted to dwell amidst the light, and enjoy the inconceivable delights of heaven's own perfect day.

The path of the just commences with the deliverance of the soul from the gross darkness of its moral night, or when it is brought to an experimental knowledge of the salvation of the

Gospel. It continues through the whole period of the pious man's earthly career, and it terminates at the moment when he is summoned to the invisible world. If the beginning of this path is illumined by only the feeble rays of the morning's earliest sun, each successive stage receives an addition to the one preceding it, until at its conclusion it is enveloped in the perfect brilliancy of uncreated light.

Light is frequently employed in the Scriptures as the emblem of knowledge and of happiness. As the ignorance and misery of our fallen race are represented by darkness as the most appropriately descriptive emblem, so light, as the pleasing contrast, is used to illustrate that delightful change which is produced in the mind when it is delivered from the ignorance, the spiritual blindness, and the misery of sin, and made a partaker of the knowledge and joys of salvation.

The just man, or the faithful believer, makes continual progress in the knowledge of the truth, in holiness, and in his religious enjoyments. His path is illumined by no meteor-like blaze, which dazzles for a moment and then expires. It is no rising day lowering into mist and darkness. It is a path illumined by a steady blaze, and it increases continually until it is lost in the surpassing splendour of the cloudless light of heaven. It "shineth more and more." This is the character and reward of persevering piety. It is progressive in its nature, and it yields to its possessor richer and more satisfying pleasures the longer it is possessed. The commencement of a life of piety may be, and often is, connected with many sore conflicts of mind, and perplexing doubts and fears, but these are gradually overcome, until the soul becomes possessed of a settled peace, and of a quiet and undisturbed repose.

Let us, then, examine a little further a few reasons why it may be said that the "path of the just is as the shining light,"

which continues to increase until it attains to the brightness of the perfect day. Persevering and steadfast piety may be compared to the progressive diffusion of light :

1. Because of the increasing evidence which it affords of the divine reality of religion.

There are some things which can be learned only by experience. Of these the religion of the Bible is one. It is true there are other kinds of evidence of its reality, but there are none which enable us to comprehend its nature, excepting that which is furnished by an experimental knowledge of its saving power. We may hear of it by the hearing of the ear, and in theory be convinced of its existence; but never is its heavenly origin so fully proved as when it becomes the subject of individual experience. The evidence arising from this source always has an increasing power. The longer it is felt in the heart, the more fully is its power proved. We find how well adapted it is to meet the wants of our nature, and to support and comfort us amidst all the varying circumstances of this life. Every fresh trial we make of its principles, we become more fully satisfied of their safety. Each succeeding application we make to it for the consolations we need when the sorrows of this life encompass us about, gives us an increasing assurance that "earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot heal;" and that

"Here may the wretched sons of want
Exhaustless riches find;
Riches, above what earth can grant,
And lasting as the mind."

If we examine the experience of the servants of God, we may learn the delightful truth that those who, by the longest period of trial, have most fully tested the power and excellence of religion, have become the most fully satisfied that it is no cunningly devised fable; and those who have proved it in the

hottest furnace of affliction, have returned from the fiery ordeal with their graces most highly refined. With them the feeble rays of the morning sun have been succeeded by the powerful beams of the meridian sun. Saved from the shadow of a doubt, they can declare with the perfect faith of a well tried Job,—“I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” Job xix. 25-27.

2. Those who persevere in piety are blessed with an increasing assurance of the Divine favour.

A consciousness of the favour of God is absolutely essential to the peace of the soul. This is the light which begins to shine in the heart of the believer, and the only sure source of peace to the conscience. This, at the first, may be dim and not in all cases satisfactory. The newly justified soul is often troubled with doubts, and a distressing uncertainty concerning its acceptance with God; but that evidence which was weak at the first continues to grow stronger, and clearer, and more satisfactory, as the soul increases in the knowledge of God and spiritual things, until all doubt and uncertainty is dissipated, and—

“No anxious doubt, or rising fear,
Draws from its source the falling tear.”

That faith which at the commencement depended more upon feeling than upon knowledge, and which was as variable in its exercise as the emotions of the mind, by degrees grows into a habit, and keeps the soul in perfect peace from an abiding assurance of the Divine favour.

There is a perpetual advancement towards that full assurance of faith which “is the evidence of things not seen,” and

which affords joy and peace to the believer, even when called to endure the severest trials, and to wade through the deepest waters of affliction. Faith, itself, is also strengthened by the new discoveries which increasing knowledge gives of the love of God, and of the fitness and fullness of the atonement, and the all-prevailing intercession of the Saviour; and thus does the confidence of the believer continue to increase. Communion with God becomes more constant and delightful, until the soul comes into the possession of the perfect light of the Divine countenance.

3. The life of persevering piety may be compared to the shining light also, because of its increasing pleasures. Nor is this the least delightful circumstance connected with the life of the believer. He knows that however great may be his enjoyments now, his happy experience testifies that the farther he travels in the way of wisdom, the more pleasant it becomes. The knowledge of God, or a consciousness of the Divine favour, is the source from which flow all the solid and lasting comforts of the soul. Without the perpetual assurance of the favour of God there can be no abiding and joyous peace. But where this is possessed in the soul, it opens a fountain from which flow living streams of heavenly pleasures, and which continue to increase as they flow, until they mingle with the unbounded ocean of eternal delights. Each step of advancement in Divine knowledge which the soul obtains, affords increasing pleasure; each brighter discovery of the glory of the Divine perfections renders the meditations of the soul more cheering and delightful; every source of spiritual pleasure affords a more constant and a richer supply; and thus the soul continues to increase in the abundance, the permanence, and the satisfying nature of its pleasures, until having arisen from one degree to another, it finally attains to the infinite and unsullied bliss of heaven,

The duties of religion, by persevering practice, become the habit of the soul, and instead of being regarded as an irksome task are like oft recurring seasons of pleasing recreation, which bring with them a whole train of unmingled delights. What a countless multitude of always increasing pleasures are afforded by the word of God; the ordinances of his house; Christian communion; and those works of mercy and labours of love in which the servants of God are called to engage! All these, to a spirit prepared for them by the salvation of the Gospel, present pleasures which never cloy, and which afford a richer and still richer satisfaction.

That steadfast confidence in God, which is the fruit of persevering piety, brings with it a joy as imperishable as the source from which it flows. To be able to rely upon the wisdom and goodness of God, at all times, even in seasons of adversity and affliction; to possess an abiding assurance that all things shall work for good, and that all the dispensations of Providence, however adverse to his present interests they may seem, will finally result in the accomplishment of his eternal happiness, is surely a persuasion which will afford unmingled pleasure under every variety of the scenes of man's earthly existence. And this is the sure reward of persevering piety. The faithful believer learns to trust in God at all times; to interpret things not by appearances, but by faith; to trust even when he cannot see; and from the numerous instances of the Divine interpretation and watchful care by which he is surrounded, he is ever increasing in the joyousness of his confidence, that the eyes of the Lord are ever upon the righteous; upon them that fear him, and hope in his mercy. He becomes more free from anxiety as to the present and the future, from a longer experience of the past, and he walks steadfastly through paths of danger, confident in the protection of heaven, and rejoicing in his unerring Guide.

4. But lastly : those who persevere in piety are blessed, and rendered increasingly happy by obtaining clearer views, and more cheering prospects, of the inconceivable glory of their future home. The traveller, or the mariner, as he approaches the place of his destination, first obtains an indistinct glimpse, and dimly sees the object of his most ardent desire ; but as he advances, the dimness of a distant sight gives place to the clearness of a nearer view, until he beholds with open vision in the light of perfect day. So is it with the pilgrim while travelling to the skies. His path leads from earth to heaven, and it is a path which is illumined at each successive stage with the increasing splendour of celestial light, and it ends in the perfect day of heaven. The farther he travels in this way, the more clearly he discovers the nature of his future home, and anticipates with a more thrilling delight the joys of his eternal rest. Here he sees through a glass darkly, but the darkness is continually passing away. Here he knows but in part, but he is advancing towards the place where he shall see even as he is seen, and know even as he is known, and where—

“ Rising floods of knowledge roll,
And pour and pour upon the soul.”

The light which shines upon his path here is but the light of the morning; and even that is sometimes obscured by clouds; but it will end in perfect day, and that shall be the unclouded and eternal day of heaven, the perfect day of revelation, of deliverance from sorrow, doubt and fear, of eternal joy, and of the glorious vision of God himself.

Is your path that of the just? And does your experience agree with the truth contained in the text? Are you increasing in the knowledge and love of God?—in your religious enjoyments?—in the fervency of your spiritual affections and desires?—in the steadfastness of your confidence?—and in the brightness of your heavenly prospects?

SERMON XXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER, HIS STATIONS, DUTIES AND CLAIMS.

FOR THE PRIEST'S LIPS SHOULD KEEP KNOWLEDGE, AND THEY SHOULD
SEEK THE LAW AT HIS MOUTH; FOR HE IS THE MESSENGER OF THE
LORD OF HOSTS.

MALACHI ii. 7.

IF WE HAVE SOWN UNTO YOU SPIRITUAL THINGS, IS IT A GREAT THING
IF WE SHALL REAP YOUR CARNAL THINGS?

1 CORINTHIANS ix. 11.

These passages are selected more by way of indicating the subject of our remarks on this occasion, than for the purpose of giving an exposition of their meaning and application. They set forth truths which every christian is bound to consider; and it is not less the duty of the minister to press the precepts herein contained upon the serious attention of the people, than it is for them to give heed to the obligations and duties which these passages of Divine revelation impose. And while selecting this subject for consideration, I am not at all unconscious of the sentiment which now so widely prevails amongst even christian people, that ministers should be very slow to speak of anything in which their own position, and especially their secular interests, are concerned. Even the

very mention of the subjects indicated by the texts we have read may perhaps startle some, and awaken in the minds of many more unpleasant reflections in regard to the propriety, or even delicacy, of such a discussion in the pulpit. However much I might desire to avoid any subject that might excite unwelcome emotions, he who is appointed to enforce the Divine will has no choice when and where that authority defines his duty. If any avoid this delicate subject, not on their own account, but for the sake of those who think that the discussion may prove injurious to religion, by furnishing ground for the suspicion of mercenary motives, which some affect to entertain against christian ministers; while I may respect their fears, and sympathize with their conscientious solitudes, yet I should regard it as an impeachment of your good sense, and a reflection upon your christian principles, not to attempt to indicate the propriety of enforcing what God has commanded us to declare; that the neglect of others on this point shall not deprive me of the right to say, I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you; and "have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God:" nor shall I apprehend any evil results from an attempt to explain and enforce any, and every, christian duty which the Divine Spirit has enjoined in the written word.

That part of our subject which enjoins upon the church the support of the christian ministry, is found in the writings of that apostle who was so sensitively alive to everything that might compromise the honour, or hinder the success, of the Gospel, that he declares he would rather die than that his glorying should be made void, though to maintain that boast he should be compelled to preach the Gospel without charge. Yet this very apostle here inculcates the duty of supporting the christian ministry, upon an infant church, when he might

naturally be afraid of putting a stumbling-block in their way, by exciting prejudice against that religion they had so recently embraced. But though the Apostle might have been apprehensive of the risk of setting forth under these circumstances the pecuniary claims of christianity, yet we see here with what frankness and decision he, who would sacrifice every personal right and interest, and even life itself, to the honour of the Gospel, demands the recompense due to ministerial toils; without so much as betraying the remotest suspicion that he might injure the religion of Christ by enforcing a duty which bears the stamp of Divine authority, and which commends itself alike to the ready assent of the enlightened judgment, and the noblest feelings of the pious heart.

We are the more confident of the utility of thus urging attention to this duty, from the conviction, that those who live under the inspirations of vital godliness, and aspire after the attainment of an intelligent christian manhood, will welcome, and be edified by, the consideration of this subject. Because I know that they deplore the inadequate attention that is given by too many to a subject which so deeply affects the interests of the church: while those who would gladly lose sight of this important christian duty, or who would assign it a place in the cold region of convenience and charity, if not blot it entirely from the code of Divine law, and banish it from the christian's breast, are the very persons for whose correction and instruction in righteousness we are compelled to set forth the claims of christianity, and enforce that obedience which heaven demands for the honour of his church, and their highest good.

In the consideration of this subject, two topics are presented for our attention by the texts we have read.

I. The character and duties of the christian minister.

II. The claims of ministers to an adequate support.

The minister is here declared to be the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. Though this definition refers primarily to the priests under the Jewish dispensation, yet it is equally applicable to the christian ministry, and especially will it be so understood and received by those who hold that every true christian minister is divinely called to that high and important office. No outward call of the church can constitute a man an ambassador of Christ, apart from the inward conscious moving of the Holy Spirit, of which the voice of the church is to be regarded as only the formal recognition. The term here employed is one that is generally applied to represent both a high office and important service. An ambassador of a king or government, is a representative next to the sovereign or head of the government and is entrusted with the most important affairs of the nation. The rank he holds by the government he represents, and the business he is employed to transact. What earthly dignity, then, can be compared with that of the office of a minister of Christ, whether we consider the source from which it is derived, or the important interests entrusted to its care? The apostle Paul sets the matter forth in its true light when he declared, "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. v. 20.

The peculiar qualifications for the office and work, we here refer to by an expression indicating the obligation the messenger of the Lord is under to seek a knowledge of the Divine will. As a messenger or an ambassador of an earthly sovereign is supposed to know the mind of him by whom he is commissioned and sent, so the ambassador of Christ must be a living repository of that truth which is revealed in the

written word, and realized in the experience of the believer, so that he may be prepared at all times to set forth the mind of the Spirit for the edification of the church and the salvation of the world. It is not to be inferred that ever the true minister of Christ is endowed with any miraculous gift for the acquisition of the knowledge he requires, other than by the patient and diligent study which is necessary in searching for truth of any kind. He, however, who is called to be an expositor of the Divine will may expect the special aid of the Holy Spirit in seeking such a knowledge of the word of God as will qualify him to be an instructor and guide of the people, in things which belong to their peace; and so to give proof of his knowledge as to commend himself to the respect and confidence of those to whom he is sent. Hence it is said, that the people should receive the law at his mouth, as from one endued with skill to discern, and rightly divide, the word of truth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.

The representation here given of the office and work of a minister, demand the serious attention of every person who desires the efficiency of the instrumentality which God has ordained for the edification of the Church and the salvation of the world. We claim for christian ministers no unreasonable exemption from the judgment of their fellow men and christians. Yet we have no hesitation in declaring, that no church can enjoy the Divine blessing, and present to the world an aspect of light and conquering power, in which this supreme office does not receive the respect and confidence to which it is entitled, and its importance demands. And yet how many professed members of the church, and it may be occupying important official positions, while they are disposed to render due honour and obedience to the appointed servants of an earthly sovereign or ruler, treat the messenger of the Lord of Hosts as

though he were a mere menial, to be employed as the servants of their will. Instead of esteeming them highly in love for their work's sake, their defects, real or imaginary, are criticised, and their supposed short comings and unfaithfulness magnified into faults, and often with a freedom and uncharitableness that even sinners would tremble to exhibit. The spirit which inspires such dispositions and conduct is both unscriptural and pernicious. How can such persons honour the minister as the ambassador of the Most High, and receive his message as from God, while they subject both him and his work to the test of an imperfect, if not disordered, judgment? No person can form a proper estimate of what belongs to a position which he himself has never occupied. This is true, especially with regard to the office of the Christian minister. And yet how many, and those, too, perhaps, the least qualified by intelligence or grace, set up a standard to determine how much he can perform, and in what manner his duties should be discharged, and they vainly attempt to reduce to a set form that diversity of gifts which the Great Head of the church has conferred upon his servants, for the perfecting of the saints, and the performance of the various duties which the work of the ministry requires for the accomplishment of its important object. The exact manner in which the minister can best employ his time and talents, must be left in a great measure to his own judgment, under the direction of the Divine Spirit, and the constraining impulse of the love of Christ; and, unless in case of manifest delinquency, he is entitled to the confidence of those over whom he is placed, and to the credit of cherishing at least as earnest a desire as they possibly can, so to discharge his duties as to secure the approving smiles of his Master, and promote the prosperity of his church. But wherever a disposition to murmur and censure is cherished, it will sooner or

later produce its natural fruits. Instead of inciting the minister to earnestness and zeal in his work, and affording him the encouragement and hope of success which the cheerful co-operation of a willing people is calculated to inspire, he will be more likely to become a partaker of the common spirit, and the truth of the Scripture proverb be realized, "Like people, like priest." Hos. iv. 9.

The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth, says, "Ye are in our hearts to die and live with you." But what was the inspiration under which was breathed this self-sacrificing devotion to their interests? Was it not while enjoying the consolation he received by the coming of Titus? "when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me." So let the minister of Christ feel that he lives in the hearts of the people, and they will live in his heart, and under even an ordinary measure of grace, he will be impelled to earnest efforts for their good, and prove to be the messenger of good things, and the united and willing co-operation of minister and people will be crowned with success in the salvation of sinners. This is plainly the order which the prophet sets forth in the words we have selected.

The second part of our subject leads us to consider the claims of the christian minister upon the church for his support.

The apostle seems, by the figure employed, to regard this just as natural a result as the connection between sowing and reaping. Hence he says, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" Indeed, to the intelligent and devout christian, no other argument is necessary than proof that it is of Divine appointment, and I venture to take the ground, that when the heart is right with God and his church, this claim will be as fully and cheer-

fully met as any other. That this duty was enjoined under the law none will question, and the words of the inspired apostles show that the same obligation is perpetuated under the Gospel; and that in reality it is one so obviously proper, that it may be termed a duty of natural religion; or in other words, it is but common justice. With all the consciousness that he was enforcing a duty from the very lowest consideration by which the christian can view it, that of common justice, he says to the Corinthian Church, "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope." "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" Then, to show that the Gospel was not less just and considerate than the law of natural rights, he says, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel."

The principle here enjoined was illustrated in the personal example of our Lord during the period of his public ministry; for in addition to the entertainment he received wherever he was preaching the Gospel, it is said that certain women who followed him ministered to him of their substance. So, also, when the apostles were sent forth on their mission, they were directed to make no provision for their support, trusting to the sense of justice in those to whom they ministered, for an appro-

prate reward for their labours. Indeed, so clearly is it the dictate of natural religion, or common justice, that those who labour for others should receive an adequate return for their services, that it seems hardly to have required more than the mere injunction, "Now judge of yourselves, does not nature teach you what is right?" Apart from the interposition of Divine authority on this subject, would it not have been manifest to every person of common sense and right feeling, that if one class of society pursue their secular callings to provide what is necessary for this life, and another devote their time and strength to mental and spiritual pursuits for the good of others, that those who enjoy the spiritual benefits of those studies and services, should render in return a share of the gains of their secular pursuits?

To wish it were otherwise, or to endeavour to secure the highest advantages at the lowest possible cost, betrays such a perversion of mind and heart, and such a destitution of all just moral feeling, as is utterly opposed to all the dictates of common honesty, to say nothing of the nobler impulses which christianity inspires. For the people to desire and demand the advantages of the minister's studies, his mental solicitude, and physical exertions, while he receives no adequate share of their worldly gains, is as manifestly unequal and unjust, as it would be for the minister to claim to be supported by their labours, and do nothing for them in return.

The question then arisen, what are the rules or considerations by which Christians are to be guided in the performance of this duty? It will not avail us before God to urge the plea to which the money-loving professor resorts, that because no specific rate is laid upon our property, that therefore the merest pittance will suffice. Yet there are principles laid down which have all the force of an imperative rule. These may be set

forth under the inquiry, what measure of support will answer the ends of justice,—most fully accord with the language of Scripture; and most effectually promote the interests of the church, and provide for the salvation of the world?

1. Our first inquiry then is, what is just and right? We say, what is just? for the Scriptures present the subject in that light, and certainly give no countenance to the notion that the support of the ministry comes under the head of charity. Not only so, but the language of the apostle implies that even the most liberal support that can be given to the minister is a very small consideration when compared with the advantages of his labours. He says, is it a great thing that we reap your carnal things in return for the rich harvest you may reap from the seed of life which we sow? And what rational man ever supposed that he was performing an act of charity in paying the labourer for his physical toils? How much more then does the labourer who performs the highest and most valuable service stand upon the ground of justice in his claim for his reward? This is the ground on which the minister's claim to support is placed by Christ himself: "The labourer is worthy of his hire." Nor will the Christian, who exercises an enlightened and unbiassed judgment in determining his duty, regard his contributions for the support of the ministry as belonging to any other class of expenses than the payment of just debts—recompense given for services performed. To view the subject in any other light, would be about as proper as for the proprietor of an estate to compliment himself for his charities, because he pays the steward who watches over the property which secures to him his income.

The question then arises, what amount of recompense is necessary to answer the ends of justice? To determine this correctly, we may compare the services of ministers with those

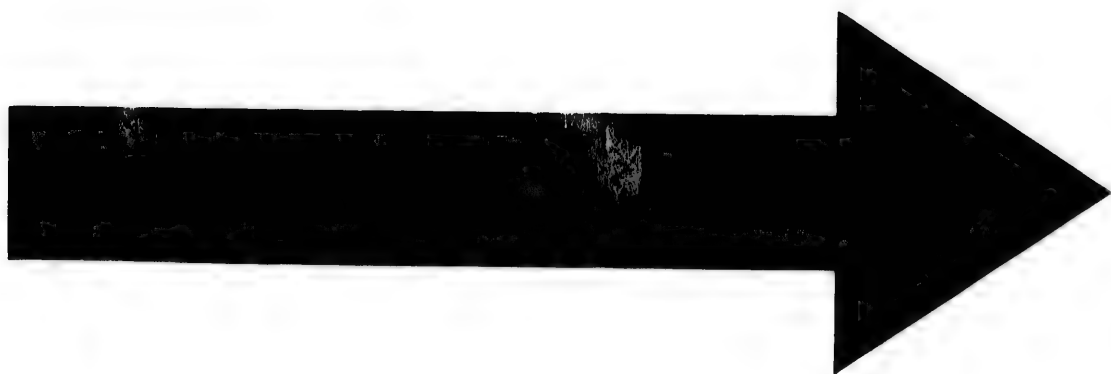
of other persons who benefit society by their talents and toils. As a general rule, mental services are considered entitled to a higher recompense than mere physical or bodily labour, because the former, while they demand the exercise of the higher qualities of our nature, as well as a superior order of mind, they are the most difficult to be procured, are generally connected with weightier responsibility, and the best interests of mankind, and the performance of such services are the most exhausting to even the physical powers. If the recompense given to physicians, lawyers, and others, whose intelligence and professional skill benefit their fellow men, be the standard by which we are to judge, I ask whether the just claims of the ministry to an adequate support are generally accorded and met? Is it not rather too commonly the case that they are adjudged worthy of no higher rate of reward than is given to the mechanic or labourer, for the mere exercise of muscle and sinew, and left without any assurance or legal guarantee that even that much is secure? It is also worthy of notice, that it often happens that those very persons who would accord the lowest recompense for ministerial service, demand the highest order of talent and the most self-sacrificing devotion. They are never satisfied without such powers in the pulpit, and such zeal and activity in the pastoral work, as if employed in other enterprises, would secure a fortune. Yet they adjudge such services entitled to a mere living, if even that. Does this answer the ends of justice? Judge ye! Besides, how many of this class of economists, while securing all the comforts of wealth by the very habits of industry and frugality and integrity, which Christianity teaches and promotes, would be alarmed at the idea of such a salary for a minister, as would enable him to make even the smallest provision for a future day? The same persons, too, are generally quite orthodox in their belief

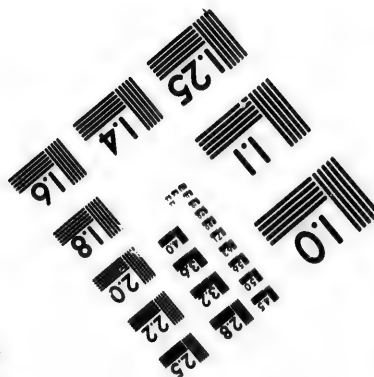
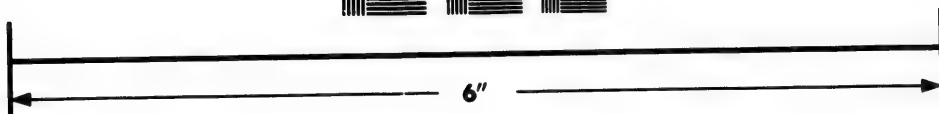
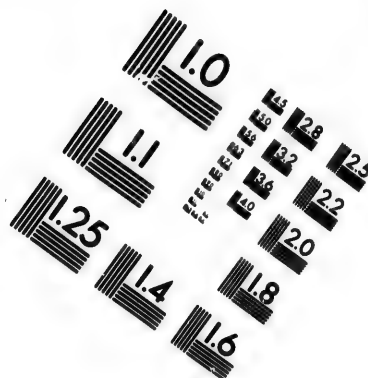
that it is the christian duty of good husbands and fathers to provide for their widows and orphans ; but they seem entirely to overlook the fact, that a minister who is equally subject to disease and death, should be at least as tender and faithful, if not as provident for the future as any of the people. It is true that a concern for the future of worldly wants is often carried to an undue if not a guilty extreme, from which a minister should avoid the very appearance. But should not the same danger be shunned by the people? Covetousness and worldly anxiety for the future, are sins in them as well as in him. Just in the same degree in which it is lawful and right for any christian to provide for those dear to him, in the event of his death, in the very same degree is it lawful and right for the minister. Yet how seldom is it the case that this can be done, or any provision be made from his salary while he lives and labours. Hence when even this often inadequate resource fails, by sickness or death, those who were identified with him in his sacrifices and toils, and looked to him for support, and had a claim with him in equity, must be cast upon the charity of the church. Is *this* justice?

II. Our second inquiry is, what amount or proportion of recompense should ministers receive in order to meet the requirements of Scripture precept and example? This may be inferred in some measure from the declaration, that the Lord has ordained, or commanded, if you please, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel; not maintain a bare existence by the most rigid economy, but live by it in the best sense of that term, as did those of old who served at the altar live by the altar. The plain meaning of this inspired declaration is, that such a remuneration as the tribe of Levi enjoyed under the ancient dispensation, the christian ministry should now receive. What this was is clearly pointed out in

the Sacred History, from which we learn that one tribe, constituting, as we may fairly suppose, one-twelfth part of the nation, had a tenth part of all the produce of the land, besides several cities, and certain offerings presented to the Lord for the service of the temple; showing most obviously that the ministers of religion were so provided for as to occupy a position a little above the common average of the people, neither being pinched by want, nor rioting in abundance. The same representation is, doubtless, intended by the language of the apostle when he speaks of "reaping your carnal things;" that is, that they are to share a liberal proportion of the worldly gains of those amongst whom they sow in spiritual things, and this, too, upon the supposition that what the people contribute is only equal in value to what the minister gives. But the language of the apostle implies more than a fair exchange of one commodity for an equal value of another; for he says, is it a great thing for you to do this much? teaching most clearly that while this reaping of carnal things is the lowest consideration upon which the recompense of ministers should be given, the benevolent impulses which christianity inspires, and the unspeakable benefits it confers, should secure a generous acknowledgment of the obligations which the enjoyment of its blessings imposes.

Another consideration may aid in forming a correct estimate on this point. Ministers of the Gospel are enjoined to be ready for every good work, to be ready to distribute, and to be examples to the flock in all that is benevolent and useful. They, as well as others, should not be forgetful to entertain strangers, observe the rites of hospitality, to assist the needy, and exercise a liberal spirit in supporting all the institutions of the church, and thus incite by example as well as by precept; but how can they meet all these requirements out of an income





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that is only barely sufficient for their own necessities, without neglecting to provide for their own households, and thus denying the faith and becoming worse than an infidel?

III. Our third inquiry is, what provision for the support of the ministry is necessary for the highest interests of the church?

What this is may be understood from the generally recognised fact, that no position or work more requires an undivided attention and earnestness of purpose in order to insure success, than that of the christian minister. The charge to Timothy, "to give himself wholly to these things," is the injunction laid upon every minister. And so deeply are the interests of the church involved in this matter, that our Lord ordained that his ministers should be so supported as to be relieved from any worldly labours or cares that might have a tendency to deprive the church of the full benefit of their undivided attention, and the utmost elasticity of mind. How quick-sighted, too, are the members of the church to perceive any want of attention to their welfare, when perhaps it is the natural and unavoidable result of their own inattention to his temporal wants,—leaving him so racked with anxiety to provide things honest in the sight of all men, by devising ways and means to make a scanty and uncertain income hold out for the supply of his imperative wants—that the church is robbed of the pleasure and profit that might be derived from the unburdened energies of his mind, and the generous flow of his soul. In worldly professions and enterprises, men are enabled to rise above the present pressure of embarrassment or want, by the hope that extraordinary professional exertions will sooner or later insure relief. But woe to the minister and the people when the fires of the pulpit, and the zeal of pastoral labour in visiting from house to house, are kindled by the mer-

cenary desire to eat a morsel of bread! When such is the case, the church eats the fruits of its own doing—or want of doing rather,—and if the evil arise from want of inclination or attention, rather than from ability, it is aggravated by the terrible and crushing weight of the Saviour's anger, who will call them to answer for their sin and its consequences, when both minister and people shall be judged at his bar.

I am not unaware of some of the ideas that prevail in regard to this matter. It is dangerous for the minister to be rich! say some. It is harder for him to make his way into the kingdom of heaven, against the influence of wordly comfort and prosperity, than it is for the people! It is not a little singular that those who profess to cherish this benevolent concern, that ministers should be kept as far away as possible from the danger of riches, are not at all afraid of increasing the hazards of their own salvation, by adding to their own wealth all that they can save by robbing God, and withholding the claims of the church! It is certainly the attainment of an exalted height thus to love their minister *more* than themselves, and which makes them willing to guard his security against the peril of riches, even at the risk of placing themselves in more eminent danger of being found amongst those who shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God.

But, say others, troubles are good for ministers; and suppose they are, cannot the world and the devil make troubles enough for the minister without the church becoming a thorn in his flesh by adding poverty to the list? But they preach better for affliction and under the rod. If so, it is when the rod is in the wise and prudent hand of God, and not that of covetous and wicked men. An afflicted soul, or a broken heart, is very good for confession and prayer, but it is a bad state for preaching. In the pulpit the joy

of the Lord is his strength; and he reigns and triumphs over the hearts of the people only when they reign and triumph over his.

But further, the interests of the church are inseparably involved in the character of its ministry. If God has constituted this chief office in the church the grand instrumentality for the accomplishment of his high and holy mission, and has reserved to himself the prerogative to select his own ambassadors, is it not reasonable to infer that he will choose those who both by intellect and grace are best fitted for the important work? Men, though impressed with a sense of a Divine call to the work of the ministry, are liable to be swayed by any and all the worldly influences to which human nature is exposed. How many a promising youth, whose career in the ministry of the church might have been like the sun in the heavens, has been turned away from this high and holy calling by the forebodings of the sacrifices and worldly want that it involved, and chooses a lower path, perhaps at the risk of his own salvation, because that path presented a more inviting prospect of worldly gain. Whatever you may think of the idea, I do not hesitate to declare, that to me it is one of the stronger evidences of the Divinity of our holy religion, that so many men are found who forsake every other work and calling, with fair prospect of ample rewards, to become the ministers of Christ and his church, without any such assurance of remuneration as is considered only reasonable and proper in all other departments of both intellectual and physical labour. And what a mournful proof is it, that the veil is still remaining upon the heart of the church, which prevents it from realizing how deeply its own interests are involved in the inadequate attention that is given to this important part of its duty. And what must be the feelings and prospects

which could induce a professedly christian parent to confess to the fact, that he had used his influence during a season of revival, and successfully too at the time, to prevent the conversion of his son, lest he should become a minister of Christ ! All loyal and patriotic subjects, regard an appointment to office under the crown, as an honour to be desired and sought ; and yet, tell it not in Gath, that a subject of Christ's kingdom would rather risk that his son should endure the everlasting displeasure of his sovereign, than that he should receive the highest office in the gift of the King of kings.

We do not wish to see the office of the christian ministry rendered so inviting by worldly inducements, as to attract those whom neither nature nor grace designed for that designation ; but we insist that reason and scripture, and the interests of the church demand, that every person who is moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon him the office and work of the ministry, should feel that in obeying the Divine impulse, to go forth and sow in spiritual things that he will reap an average share of the carnal things, of those for whom he scatters the seed of life. If he chooses to forego all, and make the Gospel known without charge to those amongst whom Christ has not been named, let it be to him the blessing and reward of a voluntary sacrifice, and not the unjust exaction of an unfaithful and careless church.

But says one, our minister is contented and gratified for the amount he receives. And this conclusion is drawn from the fact that because his self-respect, and regard for the honour of his office, induce him to bear his privations without murmuring, that therefore he is satisfied with his lot. But must a minister's delicacy be tried to its utmost limit, until the suffering becomes intolerable, and he is compelled to break the silence ? Is that the way to inflame his zeal and promote the interests of the church ? Is it not the more excellent and christian

way for the people to remove all ground of complaint, by such an attention to his temporal wants, as will leave him free to make full proof of his ministry?

IV. Our fourth and last inquiry. What is the duty of the church to the ministry, in order best to promote the conversion of the world?

The church is set as the light of the world, and as its ministers occupy a most conspicuous position, they are in some respects the representatives of the church by which the world judges of its spirit and character. The apostle Paul enjoined upon Timothy, that a bishop must have a good report of those who are without, and he should therefore both by his character and position have access to every rank and class in society, that he may out of all save some. He should neither be so exalted as to separate himself from the poor, nor so depressed by worldly want as to be beneath notice, and respect of the rich, but should be placed in that medium which will open his way to all as their common friend. I regard as lightly perhaps as it deserves distinction of rank, which wealth, and title, or office confers, and yet the customs and usages of the world cannot be entirely overlooked by those who are seeking to win the world to Christ. There is a sense in which it is not only lawful, but even the duty of the minister to become all things to all men. But how can he do this, if he is so depressed in his worldly circumstances as in effect to exclude him from access to persons of wealth and rank who have souls to be saved, or lost, and thus fulfill his mission to all? While he should thus have the respect and confidence of the rich, he should also be able to assist the needy in distress, by something more than his counsels and his prayers. The men of the world, both rich and poor, look to a minister for an example of liberality, and will very much esteem or despise him, as they find him generous in his gifts, or greedy of filthy lucre.

The prophet says, that the priests lips should keep knowledge in order that he may be prepared to communicate it on all proper subjects and occasions; but how can he do this unless he has both the means and time for intellectual culture, and to search for truth? By his knowledge of general science and literature, the minister should be qualified to command respect amongst every class, to bear his part in conversation on every proper subject so as to make all his knowledge minister to the one end of his labours, in teaching the world the love of God and man.

But in considering what will best promote the salvation of the world, we must estimate another effect which this want of liberality exerts upon the world. How strange it must sound when those of the world hear Christians in the possession of a large amount of worldly good, declare how highly they value their privileges and hopes, when they learn at what a small price they endeavour to secure the enjoyment of their spiritual treasures.

The mischief done to the church and the world, by the want of liberality amongst the rich, will never be known till the light of eternity dispels the delusions of time. How often would the plain, and perhaps poor man, willingly contribute his share, but under the withering blight of a bad example, he thinks that if such a person gives only five dollars, then five shillings, or five pence, is all that should be expected from him. Here again, that insidious covetousness which clings to human nature more or less through life, comes in with its excuses and pleas. "But I have so many expenses," says the rich man, "which you do not know, in order to maintain my position in society." And suppose this is true, and that your luxuries and superfluities are amongst those expenses, must all them be met, while the claims of the church

are the only expenses that must yield to convenience, as that which is least felt and regarded? Is it only in religion that rank and position will not be affected by retrenchment of expenses? In worldly matters when prudent people find that their expenditure exceeds their income, they set about a reduction of expenses, and they generally begin with that upon which they set the lowest value, or esteem of the least importance. How many who begin with religion reach other items by but slow degrees, and with slight reductions! Are such inconsistencies likely to promote the conversion of the world, as that cheerful and self-sacrificing distribution to all men, which in the early church furnished such commanding evidences of the divinity of the Gospel and of its power? How different was the aspect presented by some of the churches to which the apostle Paul directs his epistles, in which he speaks in terms of the highest praise of their earnest care, when they sent once and again to minister to his wants, and instead of showing a cold indifference to the just claims of the minister to an adequate support, they prayed him with much entreaty to accept their offered bounty. And depend upon it, the world will never believe, and feel, the impulsive power of the high estimate which christians profess to set upon their happiness and hopes, and which they say often they would not exchange for all the earth can offer, until they shew by their works that christianity does indeed give them to realize the blessedness of a heavenly treasure, for which the largest earthly gifts are only a feeble expression and a poor return.

I have no sympathy with the idea that christianity, so far as it concerns man's interests, is a system of sacrifice, for it calls to no duty to which it does not assign an appropriate reward, it imposes no burden which it is not man's interest to carry, it demands no self-denial which is not crowned with de-

lights, richer and more satisfying than any and all we are called to forego; and it places within the reach of mankind that temporal good at which, alas, too many grasp at the risk of their chief good. The worldly professor may hoard up his earthly treasures by withholding the tithes and offerings which the Great Proprietor demands, but he will realize sooner or later the blessings and mildew with which such a withholding of the right will be vested. An Achan may rejoice for a season in the unlawful possession of his golden wedge, and hope to have it a legacy to his heir, but a heap of stones is the monumental record of his own sin, and the ruin of his family. Recollect that the reward of Gehazi's covetous success, was to transmit to his posterity his fortune and his leprosy.

In conclusion, let none harden themselves and neglect the truth under the plea that this is a mercenary appeal. If I have spoken to you the words of truth and soberness, and urged upon you duties which God's authority has imposed, and in which your interests are involved, any suspicion of improper motives on my part, will furnish you with no plea of justification if found guilty of unfaithfulness, when you and I meet to be judged at the bar of God.

Nor need the impenitent sinner attempt to take advantage of any real or imaginary unfaithfulness on the part of the church; to congratulate himself that he is acting a more consistent and less guilty part by rejecting the claims of both God and his church. In your character and conduct there is no one redeeming feature. The christian who acknowledges the claims of God upon him, even though those claims, through the depravity of human nature, may be only imperfectly and partially met, is more likely at least to receive the approbation of his master, than he who impiously asks what is the Almighty that I should serve him? As the ambassador of Christ, we

demand the surrender of your heart to him who bought you with his blood ; and your bodies, and your earthly goods to be laid under tribute for his service. You may still throw off the fear of God and walk in your own ways ; but remember, in the great and final day, you will reap as you have sown, and throughout eternity eat the bitter fruit of your own doings.

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SERMON XXV.

A MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN FROM THE LOVE OF GOD.

NEVERTHELESS I HAVE SOMEWHAT AGAINST THEE, BECAUSE THOU
HAST LEFT THY FIRST LOVE.

REMEMBER THEREFORE FROM WHENCE THOU ART FALLEN, AND REPENT,
AND DO THE FIRST WORKS; OR ELSE I WILL COME UNTO THEE QUICKLY,
AND WILL REMOVE THY CANDLESTICK OUT OF HIS PLACE, EXCEPT
THOU REPENT.

REV. II. 4, 5.

How changeable and inconstant is man! One day we see him pursuing one path in order to obtain pleasure; another day we seek him in the same course, but he is gone. He chases every phantom which presents itself, and grasps at every thing within his reach; but no sooner has the novelty of the newly-possessioned object passed away than some others attract his attention. Thus he is kept continually roving from object to object, never satisfied, and never at rest. The pleasure derived from the possession of the mere glittering toys of earth is of but short continuance. Hence the reason why the ingenuity of man is racked to devise new methods of obtaining or perpetuating happiness. Solomon tells us that after having pursued every path of pleasure, and having tasted every enjoyment that earth affords, he was forced to confess that all was

vanity and vexation of spirit. His own experience confirmed to him the fact that the brightest earthly treasures yield only a temporary enjoyment; they fade while they are possessed, and force their possessor on through life under the burden of a restless spirit, sighing for that which it cannot obtain—permanent enjoyment. But not so with the felicity which the possession of the love of God imparts.

Its nature is such as the spirit of man desires. For its enjoyment he was created, and without it he cannot experience any real or lasting pleasure. From this unfailing source he may constantly draw supreme felicity, and satiate the unbounded desires of his immortal spirit with pleasures that never elog. How strange then is it that any who have once tasted the superior bliss which the favour of God imparts, should ever be induced to exchange it for the unsatisfying portion of the world! And yet strange as this may be, how often are we forced, with weeping eyes and aching heart, to record the mournful fact? How frequently do we see those who were once happy in the enjoyment of the love of God, again led away into the degrading and miserable slavery of the devil. The pleasures of the world allure; its shining baits hold out to them the pleasing, though delusive, prospects of present grandeur and gain. For these objects of a moment's sparkling existence they barter their heirship and title to the enduring realities of a blissful immortality. O! if there is a sight, at the beholding of which angels drop the tear of sorrow, it is this; to see the infatuation of man, in exchanging bliss so high for misery so deep; the inheritance of the saints in light for the woes and the anguish of the gloomy caverns of despair. The words of the text are part of a message sent to the Christian Church at Ephesus; the same to which the epistle of St. Paul was addressed. But how different was their latter

from their former state! In the epistle of St. Paul they are described as being in a high state of religious enjoyment; blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; made fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and filled with the exceeding riches of his grace. They were strengthened with all might by the Spirit of God in the inner man. But now how changed their condition! At the time when the Faithful and True Witness addressed them, the gold had become dim, and the most fine gold had lost its brilliancy. They had in a measure departed from God, and fallen from that high state of grace in which they once stood, and shone with so distinguished a lustre. Something, however, of their former goodness still remained: they retained their profession of the christian faith, and had not fainted under their tribulations, but had endured them patiently for the name of the Lord. These things are carefully noticed and enumerated in commendation of their character. Then follows the heavy charge contained in the first part of the text, "Nevertheless," that is, as though he had said, Notwithstanding you possess these good qualities still, and are not wholly destitute of the fruits of faith; yet all this does not hide from my searching eye, the declension which has taken place in the holy fervency of your zeal and affection, I have this against thee, that "thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

These important words are among the things which have been written for our learning; and although they were primarily addressed to the Ephesian Church, they still retain all their force and propriety of application, and are now addressed to us, clothed with the high authority of Heaven.

We proceed to notice then—

I. The charge here preferred: "Thou hast left thy first love."

II. The exhortation to amendment: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works."

III. The reason assigned for immediate improvement: "Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

I. "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" We may remark here in the first place, that the Ephesian christians are not charged with an entire departure from God. They still retained much of the form of godliness. No charge of open wickedness is brought against them; but, on the other hand, they are described in the verses preceding the text, as **steadfastly maintaining their profession of the christian faith, as patiently enduring tribulations for the sake of Christ, and as labouring with unfainting perseverance in the cause of God.** If such then was their christian character, if they were unblemished in their outward conduct, and if they, by their good works, gave a respectable testimony of their faith in Christ, we would certainly conclude, judging from these external marks of their spiritual state, that there was no real cause of complaint concerning them. Alas! how easy is it for short-sighted man to be deceived. Man looketh on the outward appearance only, but God searches the heart, and beholds the hidden secrets of the soul. Doubtlessly there are many, who amongst men are esteemed as Israelites indeed, and as subjects of the Divine favour, but who, in the correct reckoning of the omniscient Jehovah, are accounted as having neither part nor lot in the matter. It is quite possible for persons to have the external marks of the christian, while destitute of the internal grace; to have the outward form of godliness, while at the same time

strangers to its inward power—the love of God shed abroad in the heart, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. To God alone belongs the power of discerning the true characters of men. He weighs them all in the balance of his own eternal truth, and he will discover to them, by the agency of his Spirit, their real condition. Are they the objects of his parental love? His Spirit bears witness with theirs, that they are the children of God. Does he approve of their conduct? They have the testimony of a good conscience, assuring them that all they do is pleasing in his sight. Is their faith decreasing, and their love growing cold? He will, assuredly, as he did to the Ephesian church, make them sensible of his disapprobation of their conduct.

The charge brought against this church was a decay or declension in holy love and zeal. They did not retain that strong and ardent affection for God and sacred things which they had when first brought to a knowledge of the truth. They are not charged with having forsaken the object of their love, or neglected the duties of their religious profession. These they still retained. The sin for which they are here reproved is a loss of that flaming love which they once possessed.

Great, indeed, throughout its entire extent, is the mystery of godliness, and it is only just so far as we become experimentally acquainted with the things of God that this mystery is unfolded to us. The natural man cannot know the things of God, because they are spiritually discerned, and it is utterly impossible to explain to those who are strangers to God the nature of experimental religion, at least in such a manner as to give them proper conceptions of it. But every real christian understands immediately what is meant by "first love," and too many there are, alas! who know by unhappy experience what it is to lose their first love.

The first affections of those who are brought to the enjoyment of salvation are strong and lively; Christ is the object of their warmest love. He is the one altogether lovely. Their most earnest desires are for holiness, and heavenward their every wish aspires. The service of God is now their only delight. Their meat and drink is to do the will of their Heavenly Father. Like the psalmist they exclaim, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." To them the world has lost its strongest attractions; they are sensible of the vanity of every creature enjoyment, and of the superior and more lasting joys which the love of God imparts. Hence the whole conduct of such as possess this love is a practical comment upon the words of the psalmist, where he says, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Psalms xxvii. 4. So long as they retain this first happy state, the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light; the ways of wisdom and holiness are to them ways of peace and happiness. This fervent love will render every duty a delight, will enable them to rejoice in the midst of tribulations, and to run with patience and increasing speed the race set before them.

But this state of grace cannot be maintained without the most vigorous and persevering exertions. These lively affections will abate, and this love will wax cold, unless great care is taken to keep them in constant exercise. A threefold enemy²⁻³ combined, and constantly employed, to rob the christian of this his most precious treasure. Hence it is that we are so often exhorted to keep ourselves in the love of God; to watch and pray; to put on the whole armour of God; to hold fast whereunto we have attained; all these exhortations implying certainly,

that conspiring foes are labouring to take from us this pearl of great price. The love of God is first obtained through faith in Christ, and is kept in the heart by the same means. No sooner, therefore, do we cease to exercise a living faith than we lose this love. We need scarcely stop to notice the marks by which such as have left their first love may be known. "By their fruits shall ye know them." They no longer experience the pleasure they once enjoyed in the things of God. If they do not altogether forsake the house of God, they do not delight in the worship of God as they formerly did, and are glad when the season of devotion is past, and they are permitted again to engage in their worldly employments. The duties of religion which were once their delight, are now become an irksome task, from which they earnestly desire to be freed. Secret prayer is neglected, either wholly or in part. They are less frequently found with the faithful in the house of prayer. The world, with its pleasures, again takes the place of the love of God. Now, God informs us in our text, that this is displeasing in his sight, "I have somewhat against thee." And should we wonder at all, that the conduct of such as depart from his ways is highly displeasing to him? He mercifully bestowed upon them his love; but they, by forsaking him, show how lightly they esteem it. He redeemed them from misery and death; but they refuse to render him that tribute which he justly claims. He bestowed on them the riches of his grace; but they cast away this heavenly inheritance, and chose the world as a better portion. God has declared, that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, and consequently, those whose conduct is at variance with their own eternal interests, are pursuing a course which is highly displeasing to God. Can he possibly delight to see those whom he has redeemed by his own blood, rejecting his offers of mercy, and plunging their souls

into endless misery? If the conduct of those who neglect this great salvation be so highly displeasing in his sight, how much more so must be the conduct of those who have once enjoyed his love and depart from it? They endanger not merely their own salvation, but that of others also. They become stumbling blocks in the way of many who witness their departure from God; their backslidings being a reproach upon the cause of God, and directly prevent others from entering into the kingdom of heaven. Well, indeed, then, may he have some-
what against those who leave their first love; because, in so doing, they cast a reproach upon his goodness, ruin their own souls, and shut up the kingdom of heaven against those who would otherwise enter in. To all such he addresses the words of our text, to show them how their recovery may be effected. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen."

That loss of the favour of his Creator, which man sustained when he transgressed the Divine commandment, is represented by a fall. He then descended from that high and happy state in which he first stood, to the degraded and miserable condition of a criminal and an outcast. He fell from the favour of God into a state of condemnation, from the enjoyment of that sweet communion with him in which he so much delighted, to dread the presence of his Maker; he fell from the image of God; he lost the rectitude of his nature, and the power which he at first possessed of keeping the commandments of his God. To raise him out of his miserable condition, the glorious plan of redemption was devised, and the restoration of man to the favour and image of God is called a resurrection, or a rising again. Thus David says, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Psalms xl. 2. And the apostle Paul to the Ephesians, says, "And you hath he quickened, who were

dead in trespasses and sins." "And hath raised *us* up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Ephes. ii. 1, 6. Hence persons having once enjoyed the favour of God, and lost it, are spoken of as having fallen from grace. This was the condition of those to whom the words of the text are addressed. They had been raised from the degradation of sin to the high estate of holiness, from the slavery of the devil to the glorious liberty of the children of God. But from this they had measureably departed, and were again descending to that low estate from which, by the grace of God, they had been raised. They are therefore exhorted to remember from whence they are fallen.

Strange as it may appear, those who depart from God endeavour to banish from their minds every recollection of their former enjoyments. In order to effect this, they pursue the pleasures of the world more eagerly than before; not, indeed, because they have a greater relish for them than they formerly had, but that they may the more effectually rid themselves of the unhappiness which the remembrance of their former better condition must inevitably produce. They mix with the company of the world, pursue its vanities, and seek its treasures, in order to prevent as far as possible the harrowing reflections which a retrospect of the joys they once tasted would originate. But should these things, in their hours of solitude, force themselves upon their minds, how speedily do they resort to every expedient, in order to banish the unwelcome intrusion. But to all such as have wholly or in part forsaken God, the compassionate Redeemer says, "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Compare your former happy condition with your present uncomfortable state. Remember how you once loved God, delighted in his ways, and how precious to you were his promises. Remember how high you once stood in his favour;

how you were fed with honey out of the rock, and how you ate the finest of the wheat; what pleasure you then enjoyed in the worship of God, and with what joyful haste your feet ran in the way of his commandments. Consider the state of grace in which you once stood; the happiness, love, and joy, which you felt, when you received the remission of your sins. Think of the zeal you then had for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind; your willing and obedient spirit, your cheerful self-denial, your fervour in private prayer, your detachment from the world, and your heavenly-mindedness. Remember when you were in this happy state, how pleasantly your days passed away, how easily you endured your temptations and afflictions; remember with what a calm composure you could look upon death, and how bright were your prospects of heaven. But consider how different it is with you now. Your joys are withered and fled, and have left behind them but the sad remembrance of the happy seasons you once enjoyed. You no longer delight in my service, nor take pleasure in those holy exercises which once afforded you unmingled satisfaction. Remember from what a height of bliss, to what a depth of misery you have fallen. Think how foolishly you have exchanged the permanent pleasures of religion for the fading joys of earth; the honourable liberty of the children of God, for the degrading slavery of sin; the animating prospects of eternal life, for the fearful anticipations of eternal woe. And O reflect that if you continue in your fallen state, you will finally shut yourselves out from the kingdom of heaven, and bring down upon your souls an eternal weight of woe!

“And repent.” And surely if those who have left their first love would but seriously consider the loss they have sustained, and remember how much better it was with them in days past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon them, and when by

the sustaining and comforting grace of God they were enabled to triumph over their spiritual foes, and rejoice in the furnace of affliction; if they would thus but compare their former happy with their latter uncomfortable state, they would be led sincerely to repent of the wickedness, and mourn over the foolishness of their conduct.

Such are here exhorted to a sincere and immediate repentance. They must repent of their ingratitude, in esteeming so lightly the grace of God, by which they were once saved from sin and misery; of their unfaithfulness in guarding so negligently this precious, heavenly treasure; of their wickedness in departing from God, grieving the Holy Spirit, crucifying the Saviour afresh, bringing a reproach upon his holy cause, and endangering the salvation of those who have been the witnesses of their shameful conduct. And what cause have such persons to abhor themselves and repent as in dust and ashes, when they consider how highly displeasing to God their backslidings are; how destructive of their own peace and happiness, and how ruinous to their eternal interests. But the repentance which such fallen souls are required to exercise, in order to render their recovery certain, is not merely a sorrow for the loss they have sustained, and the misery they have by this means brought upon themselves. How many there are who have fallen from grace, who remember with many a penitential sigh and falling tear, the high estate to which they once were raised, the happiness they enjoyed, and the pleasurable emotions and heavenly prospects which smoothed the rugged path of life, but who, notwithstanding, remain in their fallen state. There is a sorrow that worketh death, and there is a sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, both of which may be known by their fruits; the former producing no material change in the outward conduct; the latter always being followed

by an entire reformation. That repentance alone produces the proper effect which leads men to break off their sins by righteousness, and their iniquities by turning to the Lord ; or to use the language of John the Baptist, which " brings forth fruit meet for repentance." The persons here addressed are exhorted to repent, and as the evidence of the sincerity of their repentance, to do their " first works." They had lost the fervency of their love, and as a necessary consequence, had grown remiss in the discharge of their Christian duties. The love of God dwelling in the heart, may well be termed the main-spring of the christian's life, the living principle within by which all his actions are directed and performed. The apostle Paul says, " The love of Christ constraineth us." 2 Cor. v. 14. The Saviour says, " If any man love me, he will keep my commandments." John xiv. 23. From these inspired declarations, we may easily understand what were the first works of the Ephesian christians. They were not only faithful in the discharge of all their duties, but also careful to perform them in a right spirit, with an eye single to the glory of God. Their zeal was the pure flame of love ; their knowledge was derived from the enlightening Spirit ; their diligence and persevering labours in the cause of God, were but the outward and visible signs of their inward and spiritual grace ; the natural outflowings of the love of God which dwell in their hearts, sweetly constraining them to follow the example of Him who went about doing good. They are exhorted to recommence these labours of love. It is true they had not altogether ceased from the performance of these outward duties, but they had lost the spirit of fervent love in which they ought to be performed in order to be acceptable to God :

" For what are outward works to him,
Unless they spring from love ?"

"Do thy first works." Seek the love you once enjoyed, resume your former diligence, your fervency in prayer, your attention to all the ordinances of God's house, your zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of the souls of your fellow-men; and rest not until your souls are fully restored to the image of God, until you have recovered all that you have lost, and are again possessed of all your former enjoyments, and qualified for the discharge of all your former duties.

There is perhaps no state in which a person can be placed this side of a miserable eternity more fearfully dangerous than the one mentioned in the text. As in the diseases of the body, relapses are more dangerous than the first attack, and are generally accompanied with an incurable malignity; so in the disease of the soul, a return either partially or entire, to a state of alienation from the love of God, is generally attended with greater danger, and with less hope of a recovery, than in the first case. The heart becomes less easily influenced by Spirit of God; those vivid impressions of the importance of eternal realities with which the mind was once favoured, are not so easily produced as formerly; and the natural unbelief which reigns in the human heart, gains in those who depart from God a two-fold strength. And how exceedingly difficult is it for those who have, in any degree, gone backward from God to regain what they have lost. Shorn of their strength, they have less power to contend successfully for the faith by which the world is overcome, and enemies conquered. Ashamed of their former unfaithfulness, and backslidings, they can scarcely summon courage sufficient to enable them to commence again the spiritual warfare, fearful lest the second attempt would but expose them to the deeper mortification of second defeat. At the same time the enemy encouraged by his former success, collects all his forces, and uses every hellish art to

effect with certainty the ultimate and everlasting ruin of their souls. He presents before them in the most fearful light, the difficulties and dangers of the christian's path. What before seemed to them but mole-hills, now appear like mountains, whose rugged brows forbid the possibility of proceeding. Before them stand their foes in giant form, and hostile aspect, threatening immediate ruin to those who should attempt to advance. Well indeed has the inspired Apostle said, "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." 2 Peter ii. 20. Their condition is worse than before. They have less confidence, their enemies have more. They are discouraged by their fall, but this has encouraged their foes. Their loss of spiritual strength has increased the power of their enemies. It is hard to renew such repentance, and to induce them to do their first works. The soldier who has sustained the disgrace and danger of a defeat will not be easily induced to hazard a second conflict. It is only when the powerful considerations of safety and honour lend their aid, that he can be brought to contend with enemies to whose victorious power he has once been forced to submit.

To induce every fallen saint to repent, and to seek his restoration to the favour of God, the latter part of the text supplies the powerful motives. "I will come unto thee quickly," or a more proper translation of the original would be, "I am coming unto thee in haste." He speaks as though he was already on his way to execute his purpose upon those who delay for a moment obedience to his message.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who here speaks, is represented in the Scriptures as coming to different characters, for different purposes. To penitent believing souls he will come to dispel

their fears, and turn their sorrow into joy. To those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, he will come to bestow upon them the fullness of his grace. To the wicked he will come in flaming fire to execute the fierceness of his wrath. Finally he will come in the end of the world as the Judge of quick and dead, to give every man a reward according to his work. But he declares in this place the distinct purpose for which he is coming. I will "remove thy candlestick out of his place." I will come in the way of judgment, to deprive you of the privileges you now enjoy. There is doubtlessly an allusion here made to the lamp used in the Levitical service, which was placed in the tabernacle, or temple, and kept constantly burning. Of so great importance was this lamp, that the removal of it from its place would necessarily occasion the immediate and entire suspension of the whole of their religious exercises. Hence we may understand this threatening to signify, that if they did not repent, and resume their former labours, they would be deprived of the means of grace; they would be no longer favoured with the ministration of his word and ordinances, they would lose the influence of his Spirit, and finally they would be excluded from the presence and favour of their Creator and Redeemer.

With what fearful precision this threatening has been executed upon the Ephesian Church, the testimony of travellers abundantly confirms. Its former glories gone. The scathing hand of justice hath wielded over it the destroying sword, and left it a monumental record to all succeeding generations, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether, while the winds that sweep over the ruins of this once highly favoured place whisper as they pass, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." And how frequently have we heard of places where once the word of the Lord had free course, and

was glorified in the salvation of multitudes, but which, through the unfaithfulness of the professed followers of Christ, have been turned into moral wastes.

We have seen individuals and families, for a time, walking in the light of God's countenance and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, gradually falling from their enjoyments, losing the spirit of religion, abandoning first partially, and afterwards wholly, the practice of piety, and finally becoming miserable outcasts and apostates. They first grow cold, next become indifferent, carelessness soon follows, and the end of all is everlasting ruin. This shall be the final doom of the unfaithful; and all this may fairly be inferred from this threatening, corroborated as it is by other declarations of the inspired word. "Whosoever hath, to him," says the Saviour, "shall be given; and whosoever hath not to him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." Luke viii. 18. And again: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." John xv. 6. The unfaithful servant who neglected to improve his talent, not only had it taken from him, but he himself was cast into outer darkness.

To every halting or backsliding soul, the Lord Jesus speaks in the language of the text, "I will come unto thee quickly." I will come unto thee in judgment to hide the light of heavenly truth from thine eyes; to withdraw the long-neglected influence of my insulted Spirit; to give thee over to a hard heart and a reprobate mind; and finally consign thee to the land where darkness and despair reign with unmingled horror forever and ever.

"Except thou repent." We see here, that although the unfaithful are threatened with the speedy coming judgments of the offended Redeemer, yet to all who will hear and obey the timely warning so mercifully given, the way of escape is

opened. As though he had said, I have threatened to remove thy candlestick out of its place, to punish thee for thy ingratitude and unfaithfulness, by depriving thee of the means of grace, the influences of my Spirit, and the crown of life; but I delight not in punishing; I hate putting away. If thou wilt repent and seek thy first love, I will restrain my anger and love thee freely. Then, too, will I come unto thee, but not in my sore displeasure. I will come, and take up my abode again in thy heart, from which I have once been driven as an unwelcome guest. I will come and restore to you the peace and joy thou hast lost; uphold by my grace; and if thou art faithful unto death, I will then come and receive thee to myself, and where I am, there shalt thou be also. But remember, thou hast no time to lose. A little space is given thee to repent, and what thou doest must be done quickly; for I am even now coming either to receive thee as a returning prodigal, or to cast thee off forever as a hopelessly fallen soul.

How fearfully dangerous is the state of the fallen; not only those who have altogether departed from God, but even of those who still retain the form of godliness, but who have lost the power! The persons who, in the words of the text, are so severely threatened had but partially fallen, and they are admonished as being in danger of utter ruin. How many are there who have made shipwreck of their faith, and lost the sweet peace and comfort they once enjoyed, who do not even dream of the danger to which their fall exposes them! Their cry is peace, peace, while sudden alarm awaiteth them. And how many, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, will be disappointed at his solemn decision in that day concerning them, Depart from me; for I know you not.